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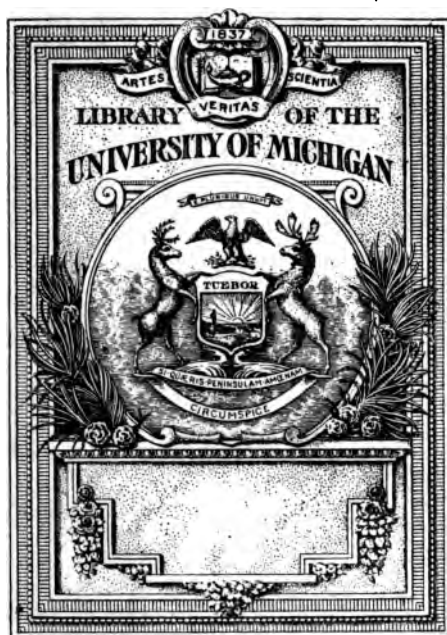
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# IN DEEP ABYSS

*by*

*Georges Ohnet*



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# **IN DEEP ABYSS**





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"Forward, all!" . . . The steam-cutter dashed at full speed

# *IN DEEP ABYSS*

A NOVEL

By GEORGES OHNET

Author of

"The Ironmaster," "Serge Panine," "Di. Rameau," etc.

*Translated by* FRED. ROTHWELL, B.A.



NEW YORK  
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## PART I





# IN DEEP ABYSS

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## Chapter I

### A FIN-DE-SIÈCLE DINNER

IN the foreigners' dining-room of the Automobilists' Club dinner was drawing to an end. It was ten o'clock. Coffee was being served, the footmen had withdrawn, and in the drawing-room close by boxes of cigars were awaiting the smokers. The guests were a dozen in number, six of either sex; the host was Cyprien Marenval, the millionaire parvenu. Around the table, adorned with rare flowers and sparkling with crystal and silver plate, amid a disorder and a familiarity explained by the excellence of the repast and the quality of the wines, the company, gathered round Marenval, was listening to a tall, fair-complexioned young man, who, in spite of frequent interruptions, continued with an imperturbable coolness.

"No, I do not believe in human infallibility even in those whose profession it is to pass sentence, and who are consequently in a position to boast of special experience. No, I can not believe that an ordinary individual, like one of ourselves, as soon as he

## IN DEEP ABYSS

takes his seat in the jury-box can be crushed by superior revelations such as will give him intuitive knowledge. No, I can not believe that kind-hearted fathers or even bachelors, from the mere fact of being clothed in black or red gowns, with or without ermine, are no longer capable of being deceived, and pronouncing sentences against which there is no appeal. To sum up, I claim the right to believe in the blindness of our countrymen in general, and of the judges in particular, and, on principle, I maintain the possibility of legal error."

Considerable excitement reigned among those present. A chorus of expressions of disapproval arose, and some of the ladies began to strike their glasses with their knives. The speaker's friends once more tried to silence him.

"Maugiron, what a bore you are!"

"We shall fine you a supper, Maugiron."

"He'll never finish his speech."

"What old-fashioned notions! He must be going in for the magistracy."

"You are a pack of idiots!" exclaimed Maugiron, profiting by a lull in the storm.

"The wretch!" exclaimed Mariette de Fontenoy.  
"Suppose we go away and leave him alone."

"Marenval, why do you invite us to dine with people who indulge in serious conversation at dessert?" asked the handsome Lucette Pithiviers.

"Hello! Look at Tragomer," said Laurence Margillier to Maugiron, who listened impassively to all these remarks. "He, at any rate, is no bore, and has not uttered a single disagreeable word."

## A FIN-DE-SIÈCLE DINNER

"Well," said Maugiron, "give me your opinion on legal mistakes, Tragomer."

"Oh, come now, that is sufficient. He is off again. Can he be tipsy? Off with him to the Bodinière. Thrust his napkin into his mouth."

All these exclamations were accompanied by roars of laughter. And yet Tragomer remained silent and impassive. He was a tall, well-built man, thirty years of age, of sunburnt complexion, with black curly hair and magnificent blue eyes. His firm-looking mouth under a dark mustache and his clean-shaven chin presented all the characteristics of strong will-power, even to obstinacy. His broad white forehead revealed faculties of reflection and imagination. Seeing him thus suddenly become serious and rather gloomy-looking, the light-hearted gaiety of the rest cooled down, and it was with a certain amount of anxiety that old Chambol, Marenval's inseparable friend, questioned the young man whose gravity formed so marked a contrast with the surrounding gaiety.

"Ah, Monsieur de Tragomer, what is the matter? Has this young ninny Maugiron given you an unpleasant impression with his paradoxes? You are extremely silent and gloomy considering that you have before you the finest wine and the prettiest women in Paris."

Tragomer raised his head, while a smile flitted across his face.

"If I appeared just now rather absent-minded the reason is that I was thinking of what our friend has just been saying, and that, in spite of

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his passionate outbursts, I believe there is a basis of truth——”

“Ah!” exclaimed Maugiron, in triumph. “You see Tragomer, a Breton nobleman, shares the opinion I have just been giving you. Speak, Tragomer, you must have at your command arguments which will convince all these idiots who were hooting me just now, and are now eagerly drinking in your words because your tragic looks lead them to expect sensational disclosures. Go at it, my dear fellow, open the floodgates of your eloquence. Crush them, Marenval especially, for interrupting me a few minutes ago.”

“Off he goes again!” exclaimed Marenval in despair. “Who will stop this chatterbox?”

“Enough!” exclaimed a chorus of voices.

“Tragomer! Tragomer!”

And the knives began to strike the glasses in measured time with a deafening noise. Maugiron waved his hand to impose silence, and in soft, fluty tones said:

“Monsieur le Vicomte Christian de Tragomer will address the meeting on the subject of legal error and its fatal consequences.”

Then, resuming his seat, he lit a cigar, and a deep silence prevailed, as tho all present suspected that Christian had important revelations to unfold.

“You all know,” said Tragomer, “that I set out for a journey round the world a couple of years ago, and so have been away from Paris and my friends, up to last autumn. During that time I trav-

## A FIN-DE-SIÈCLE DINNER

ersed numerous lands in the hope of freeing myself from the feeling of sadness which had come over me. I had weighty reasons for leaving France. A great grief had almost ruined my life. A mysterious event, even now inexplicable to me, had occasioned the arrest, judgment, and condemnation of my dearest friend, Jacques de Fréneuse——”

“Yes, we remember the sad event,” said Chambol, “the more so as Marenval is slightly connected with the Fréneuse family, and was consequently keenly affected by the terrible scandal the trial caused.”

“It must have been very unpleasant,” said Mariette de Fontenoy, “for a man like Marenval, who is a perfect gentleman, to see one of his relatives on trial at the assize court.”

Marenval gave her a look full of gratitude, and assuming a solemn attitude he said:

“It might have caused me enormous harm in the world. I was just making my way, conquering society, so to speak, by the luxury and distinction I exhibited. Very little more would have been necessary to have ruined me forever. I was a successful business man, had made a fortune in food commodities, so I found it difficult to obtain a footing in fashionable society. At a blow I fell to the position of being related to a man condemned to death. No; it was anything but pleasant.”

“Yes,” said Laurence Margillier; “for a snob you succeed pretty well.”

“I am not a snob,” protested Marenval eagerly. “I should be disgusted at being called by such a

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name, and I care only for distinction in everything. My whole life has been spent in nauseous company and I have had enough. I want to know only people of birth now."

"You would submit to a thrashing for the privilege of being intimate with a duke."

"You are right, Marenval. Never look beneath yourself."

"Yes, and make friends with those who despise you."

"In any case, I ran the risk of incurring scorn through that cursed affair," replied Marenval, vexed.

"I assure you, my hair turned gray in consequence."

"Ah! ah! turned gray, indeed?"

"He dyes it!"

"To prevent it turning red!"

"All the same, I did my duty toward the Fréneuse family. I offered my services to the mother of the unfortunate and guilty Jacques."

"Guilty?" interrupted Tragomer forcibly. "Are you sure of that?"

General excitement followed this question, so directly asked.

"Alas! I shared the opinion of the magistrates, the jury, and the public in general," said Marenval. "Unfortunately, it was impossible to doubt. The accused man himself, in the midst of his mad protests, could not supply a single argument in his own defense. Not a single favorable testimony, and a score of overwhelming proofs of guilt. One may well say that everything combined to ruin him; his own imprudence and previous conduct—everything,

## A FIN-DE-SIÈCLE DINNER

in short. It is very painful for me to be obliged to speak so. I do not believe, can not believe, in the innocence of the person of whom M. de Tragomer speaks, and, unless one is mad, it is impossible to doubt that he killed Léa Pérelli."

"In order to rob her?" asked Tragomer ironically.

"He had himself, the night before, pawned all the poor girl's jewels."

"Then why kill her, since she had given him all she had?"

"The pledges were certainly worth twenty thousand francs. Jacques owed a like sum to the club. The debt was paid at the time appointed, the pledges were presented that very day, and the jewels redeemed. Léa Pérelli was then still alive; she was only killed the same night. Ah! the cursed business is vivid enough to my mind."

"Yes, all you have just said is correct," resumed Tragomer. "Poor Jacques had pawned the jewels, but he denied selling the pledges. He said that must have been done by the real assassin, who had stolen them and redeemed the stones before the murder became known. Well, this murder, of which Jacques was accused, against which he defended himself, and for which he was summoned before the assizes—suppose he never committed it, what would you say?"

This time the handsome Christian's words produced a profound impression on the listeners. They all held their peace, and their eyes fixed on him with passionate ardor, their attitudes strained by violent



## IN DEEP ABYSS

curiosity, attested to the interest he had roused in their minds.

"Well?" asked Mariette finally.

"Well," said Tragomer slowly, "in that case, I believe a legal error was committed, and our friend Maugiron has just been speaking very reasonably."

"But regarding Jacques de Fréneuse and Léa Pérelli?" asked Laurence Margillier. "I knew Léa well; she sang divinely."

The rest lost patience, and, incapable of restraint, exclaimed:

"The story! Is there a story connected with it?"

"Of course," replied Tragomer quietly. "But you do not expect me to relate it, do you?"

"Why not?"

"Because I know I have to deal with the cleverest tongues in Paris, and I do not intend my secret——"

"Then there is a secret?"

"My secret to be promulgated in all the salons and journals of the capital."

"Oh!"

An exclamation of general disapproval followed. Maugiron himself left Christian's side and passed over to the enemy, exclaiming even more loudly than the rest:

"Down with Tragomer! Shame, Tragomer!"

But the Breton nobleman looked at them with calm blue eyes, and, sitting there with his hand supporting his head, listened impassively to all these maledictions. After leaving them to murmur forth their displeasure, he said calmly:

## A FIN-DE-SIÈCLE DINNER

"If M. Marenval will listen to me, I will relate all I know to him."

"Why to him rather than to the rest of us?"

"Because he is connected with the Fréneuse family, and because, as he said just now, he has suffered in consequence. I consider it just, therefore, to give him an opportunity of taking advantage of what I know."

"In what way?"

"That is what I will explain to himself in a few minutes."

"Good! He is showing us the door into the bargain!"

"Maugiron, I beg your pardon, you have found your master. Tragomer is even more of a bore than you are."

"What! Chambol, the inseparable Chambol will not be tolerated?"

"It is eleven o'clock," said Tragomer. "Chambol is wanted at the Opéra. They are giving 'Coppélia,' and if he did not put in an appearance, what would the ballet-dancers say?"

"Well, you see, it is useless for us to be amiable; we can not stay."

"No? Marenval, you could not make us stay now if you wished."

"Come, don't be fools," said Marenval solemnly. "The matter is serious, as you see. Leave me alone quietly with Tragomer. And for your trouble——"

"Ah! ah! A present?" exclaimed the ladies.

"Well, yes," said Tragomer, "you shall all receive a souvenir to-morrow."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

They clapped their hands; Cyprien's generosity was well known. The souvenir would be of value. Maugiron struck up, to the air of the march from "Le Prophète," "Marenval! Honneur à Marenval!" and all, in a chorus, took up the triumphal hymn, which was immediately interrupted by the hero of it.

"Silence! You will have the club officials here. Be reasonable, and go away quietly. Good-night."

## Chapter II

### A TRAGIC STORY

HANDSHAKES were exchanged, and the merry band passed into the adjoining salon for their cloaks and coats. Marenval closed the door, and, once alone with Tragomer, sat down, lit a cigar, and said to the young man:

"You may speak now."

"You know, my dear friend, the ties of affection which linked me from childhood to Jacques de Fréneuse. We had been school companions together, and in the regiment we were side by side. All his youthful follies were shared by me. Tho rather too free in our pleasures, and meriting criticism, yet we were full of ardor and strength, and we deserved a little indulgence."

"Yes, you did, my dear friend. Even in your excesses you were perfectly master of yourself; but Jacques——"

"Yes, Jacques was wanting in moderation; he could not stop in time. He was an extremist, both in joy and sorrow. After some act of folly I have seen him repentant, weeping like a child in his mother's arms; still, he repeated the same act the following day. The unfortunate part was that the family fortune did not allow of the fits of prodigality

## IN DEEP ABYSS

to which he gave himself up, and soon after wasting the inheritance he received at his father's death, my unlucky friend found himself dependent on his mother and sister."

"Ah! my dear friend, there I could not understand him. On that point I became stern and severe with him. So long as he had only broken into his own capital, I considered him imprudent, for I should look upon him as incapable of supporting himself, but I did not blame him. Every man has the right to do as he likes with his money. One man hoards it up, another squanders it; it is a mere matter of taste. But imposing sacrifices on one's relations, being dependent on two poor women, merely to spend the money thus obtained on his own vicious pleasures! There, I have no mercy!"

"Ah! You are not the only one to think so, and all the advice I gave him was in conformity with the principles you have so clearly laid down. Jacques, carried away by passion, paid no heed to my rebukes. He said that morality was easy to one who had an income of one hundred thousand francs, that it was very fine for the rich to preach regularity of life to those who had nothing; in fact, if he could keep out of debt he would be the happiest of men. And he was in debt; that I know something about. He would have ruined me had I allowed him a free hand; but altho I was very fond of him, I had to cool down his ardor for borrowing, for I soon saw he would bring me into trouble, without any advantage to himself. Besides, Madame de Fréneuse had begged me not to aid Jacques in ruining himself by

## A TRAGIC STORY

lending him money. The poor woman imagined that by straining hard at the bridle of a runaway horse you could stop him, as tho all constraint, all resistance, on the contrary, did anything other than exasperate his madness."

"Was there not at that time a proposal of marriage between yourself and Mademoiselle de Fréneuse?"

Tragomer turned pale. His face became clouded with pain; the color went from his eyes, as tho a dark cloud were passing over a rippling lake. Lowering his voice, he said:

"You call to my mind one of the cruelest moments in my life. Yes, I loved, I still love, Marie de Fréneuse. I was to marry her when the catastrophe took place. I can still see Jacques' mother calling on me one morning, half demented with grief and fear, fling herself on the sofa in my drawing-room, her limbs incapable of supporting her, and say, in a voice broken with sobs, 'They have just arrested Jacques. . . . He is now at home.'"

"The murder of Léa Pérelli had just been discovered?"

"Yes, in Léa's room a woman had been found, shot by a revolver, the wound rendering the face unrecognizable."

"A woman?" repeated Marenval, puzzled by the wording of the phrase, as well as by the tone of voice in which Tragomer had uttered it. "Do you think that the murdered woman was not Léa Pérelli?"

Tragomer bowed his head. "I have my doubts."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"But, my dear friend," resumed Marenval eagerly, "why did you not say so before now? Now that a year has elapsed, you put forward so extraordinary an opinion. Who prevented you from speaking at the trial?"

"At that time I had not the same reasons for doubting as I have to-day."

"Well, what are your reasons? Your coolness sets me on fire! You relate what is strange enough to make one disbelieve his senses as tho you were reading a theater program. What is your reason for thinking that Jacques de Fréneuse did not murder Léa Pérelli?"

"Simply the fact that Léa Pérelli is alive."

This time Marenval was dumfounded. He opened his mouth, but no sound issued from his lips. In his emotion his hand fell with a crash on to the table. But Tragomer gave him no time to recover from his astonishment. He continued:

"Léa Pérelli is alive. I met her at San Francisco three months ago, and it is because I was convinced of her identity that I shortened my journey and returned to France."

The enthusiasm with which this recital filled Marenval was even greater than had been his skepticism. Rising, he strode to and fro in the dining-room, saying in broken tones:

"Incredible! Extraordinary! Now I understand why he dismissed the others. What an uproar they would have made!"

Christian awaited till the other's astonishment had cooled down. He was not looking at him, but

## A TRAGIC STORY

seemed to have a vision in the distance before him, and a sorrowful smile came over his lips. He continued slowly:

"When I think that Jacques is in the midst of bandits, imprisoned in a bagnio for a crime he did not commit, a profound feeling of sadness comes over me. Is there a more frightful fate imaginable than that of a wretch whose guilt is violently affirmed and proved, who is secretly flung into a cell, and who, insulted by the examining magistrate in the court of assizes, and publicly enduring the moral and physical agony of the most atrocious martyrdom, repeats to all the world and to himself until he is almost mad, 'I am innocent! I am innocent!' and sees his protests received with shouts of sarcasm. The judges say to one another, 'What a monster!' The jury think, 'What a hardened villain!' The journalists expose their wit in daily summaries, and the whole of the public blindly follows their leading. Here is a man whose lot is decided on, without any possible appeal. Society, through its judges, has set on him its stamp; assassin once, he must remain assassin. Do not try to discuss; the law is there, and behind the law the judges who can not be mistaken, as we have just been told. There is no legal error—that is all moonshine invented by novelists. And if from time to time a culprit is reinstated when his innocence, probably after his death, has been proved, it is said that a powerful faction has succeeded in extorting from an infallible justice the avowal of his error. And besides, the retraction is effected with a bad grace. If by chance the man is



## IN DEEP ABYSS

alive, public authority, instead of solemnly making excuse and endeavoring to atone for the wrong, both material and moral, inflicted on him, by entrusting to him some honorable and lucrative position—in a word, by treating him as a victim—summons him and declares, sullenly, that he is free; restoring him to liberty with words in somewhat the following strain: ‘Now then, my fine fellow, don’t let us catch you doing wrong again!’ Fine justice! Righteous justice! Well paid and proudly honored! A justice worthy of admiration!”

He burst out laughing. No longer was he the quiet, calm Tragomer who during the dinner had been so reserved. The blood had mounted to his cheeks, and his eyes were sparkling. He turned to Marenval, who was listening to him in stupefied silence.

“For two years, Jacques has been lying under the crushing weight of a condemnation he has not deserved. His mother is in mourning; his sister, in despair, wishes to enter a nunnery. Simply because some unknown rascal has committed a crime with consummate skill—some one who has succeeded in throwing the charge on to this unhappy Jacques, who, indeed, seemed to have, by imprudence and madness, caused them to believe him guilty, and to have rendered it impossible that it should be otherwise.”

Marenval began to get excited. Christian’s remarks on the pretended infallibility had caused his enthusiasm to cool down. He saw that the interest of the story was flagging, and with the rigor of a

## A TRAGIC STORY

critic who demands that the dialog be abridged, he said:

"We are wandering from the subject, Tragomer; let us return to Léa Pérelli. You said you had met her. Where and under what circumstances? That is what I want to know. There is the knot of the intrigue. We will return to the rest later on. Tell me now of Léa Pérelli. You were at San Francisco, and there you met her. Where and how?"

"In the most unexpected yet natural manner. I had arrived the previous night with Raleigh Stirling, the well-known Scotch sportsman, whose specialty is salmon-fishing. I met him catching monsters on the Great Salt Lake. He had followed me, intending to fish a little in the Sacramento. I had been hunting bisons in Canada. We had been living together several weeks in the desert. It was a pleasant change to find ourselves once more in a civilized town with agreeable companions. It happened that the richest banker in the town, by name Sam Pector, was a relative of my companion. No sooner was he informed of our arrival than he sent for us in his carriage, had our luggage taken to the hotel, and half by inclination, half by force, we were put up at his place. He was a bachelor, fifty years of age, very wealthy, and living in the style of a prince. After an excellent dinner the first evening, he remarked: 'There is a performance at the opera to-night. "Othello" is to be given with Jenny Hawkins as Desdemona, and Rovelli, the great Italian tenor, as the Moor. If you like, we will go and see them from my box. If the performance tires you we will

## IN DEEP ABYSS

return here or go to the California Club, as you choose.' At ten o'clock we made our appearance in the box and found the public in ecstasies over the principal singers, who were really talented, but were surrounded by unlucky artists, whose paltry efforts rendered the performance, outside of the parts played by the principals, a real musical scandal.

"Jenny Hawkins appeared only at the end of the act. As soon as she entered I was troubled by the impression, a very vivid one, that I knew the woman who had just come on the stage. She was dark-complexioned, with well-defined features, bold eyes, and slender figure. Approaching the footlights, she began to sing. At that very moment, as tho by a flash, I understood the resemblance to another person which had struck me. Jenny Hawkins was the very image of Léa Pérelli—a Léa, however, as dark as the other was light-complexioned. She was also taller and stronger. The impression I felt was painful in the extreme. Turning my eyes away, I looked about the theater, so as not to see this phantom coming, as it did, at the other end of the world to bring back to my memory the painful circumstances on account of which I had left France. But, if I did not see her, I heard her, listening to the beautiful 'Ave Maria,' the sweet tones of which were wafted to my ear by that charming voice. Often had I heard Léa sing formerly when in Jacques's company. But I no longer recognized the voice. It was, and it was not, hers; just as Jenny Hawkins's face was that of the murdered woman, and yet it differed in

## A TRAGIC STORY

certain details. Then how could this singer be Léa Pérelli, who had been murdered in the Rue Marbeuf two years previously, and to atone for whose murder the unhappy Jacques de Fréneuse had been banished to Nouméa. Madness! A mere vision! A fortuitous meeting, incapable of sequence. A sensation which would trouble me during an evening's entertainment, and cease as soon as the curtain fell. Alas! The terrible realities to which I was brought by this resemblance would be more lasting, and nothing could prevent them being cruelly and irrevocably maintained. I thought of all this as I listened to the artist, and yet the emotion I had felt as I saw her on the stage had been so keen that I wished to verify it by a fresh examination. Turning round, I again looked at the woman. She was kneeling on a praying-desk, her beautiful head resting on her clasped hands, and her eyes looking upward, as tho to implore the protection of heaven. I shuddered. For the second time, but with infinitely more intensity than the first, I felt that Léa Pérelli was before my eyes. One evening, when Jacques was pouting after a violent quarrel they had had, I saw her kneel in the very same way, near the arm-chair into which Jacques had flung himself. She had placed her elbows on the arm of the chair, and, her cheek leaning on her clasped hands, she was looking up at Jacques with a tender, beseeching smile. It was the same face and gesture, the same look and smile. Was it possible that such a resemblance, not merely physical but moral, could exist? This test strengthened my belief more than I desired.

## IN DEEP ABYSS

I became extraordinarily troubled, and, leaning over toward my host, asked:

“‘ Do you know this Jenny Hawkins?’

“‘ Certainly. It is the third time she has sung in San Francisco, and every time she has had a great success.’

“‘ Have you ever spoken to her?’

“‘ A dozen times. She is very pretty and amiable.’

“‘ How old do you think she is?’

“‘ About twenty-five years, perhaps. She appears a little older in the town than on the stage, where she is painted and powdered; besides, the life of an artist on tour is very tiring and destructive to a woman’s beauty. If you like, I will introduce you.’

“‘ At the idea of being in this woman’s company my heart beat violently, and I turned rather pale. Pector said:

“‘ How impressionable you are!’

“‘ I continued my inquiries:

“‘ Does Jenny Hawkins speak English without accent?’

“‘ Yes, she speaks very correctly; but, you know, we Americans, like you French, have different pronunciations, according to the province in which we have been born. I should not be surprised if Jenny Hawkins were a Canadian. She gives a slightly French accent to the pronunciation of certain words.’

“‘ She sings Italian remarkably well.’

“‘ Oh, she must have learnt that for the profession. All the companies which pass along here sing in Italian or in German——’

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“‘Is she of a gay disposition?’

“‘No, rather gloomy.’

“‘Is that her own hair or does she wear a wig? Is she really dark-complexioned?’

“‘Well, you are strange. How can that affect you? Do you not like people with hair of a certain color? With so many hair-dyes, how can one know nowadays if a person’s hair is natural or not? If you want my opinion, I must say that I think Jenny Hawkins is naturally dark-complexioned, but that she used to dye blonde.’

“‘Blonde!’ I exclaimed, considerably troubled. ‘She has a slight French accent, and she dyes blonde.’

“‘Well, come along, the curtain is falling. We will go behind the scenes, if you like, and invite the prima-donna to supper with us.’

“‘One more word,’ I said. ‘How long has Jenny Hawkins, to your knowledge, been singing in America?’

“‘Three years, at least.’

“‘Three years; and under the name of Hawkins?’

“‘Certainly.’

“All my combinations were overthrown by this affirmation that the *cantatrice* had been known at San Francisco for three years, and under the name of Jenny Hawkins. How could she have been Léa Pérelli in Paris and Jenny Hawkins in America at the same time? Only three years previously had she spent a whole year under my very eyes in that apartment in the Rue Marbeuf, where one morning she

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had been found dead. This double character was inadmissible. The identity of the American was clearly established. And yet she was the living image of the ill-fated woman for whose murder Jacques was atoning. A conviction more powerful than reasoning, than probability, or even than wisdom, oppressed my mind, and in spite of everything I kept repeating to myself: 'It is Léa Pérelli.'

"We had left the box and were crossing the vast theater; a key which Pector had in his pocket opened the communication door, and we passed from the glare of the electric lamps to the obscurity behind the scenes. I followed my guide as he made his way among the scenery and accessories with the assurance of an old subscriber. He was bowed to frequently. The director hastened to meet him as tho he were a king. On my asking the reason of this, Raleigh Stirling phlegmatically replied that his relative was one of the four owners of the theater, who placed this magnificent hall almost gratuitously at the disposal of the impresario so as to assure the enjoyment of real artistic pleasures, both by their fellow townsmen and by themselves. The manager now took us in hand, and mounting a flight of stairs, we followed a passage leading to the artists' boxes. Halting in front of a door our guide knocked and said:

" 'May we come in, Miss Hawkins?'

" 'Who is with you?' asked a voice—not the singer's—from the interior.

" 'Mr. Pector and two friends of his.'

" 'Very well, come in.'

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"The door opened, and the servant welcomed us into a salon immediately preceding the actress's dressing-room. Through the half-open door came a strong light, an odor of eau de Cologne and powder, and a hum of voices. Then the actress, indifferent to our presence, sang forth a roulade by way of practise.

"The maid was speaking to her mistress, and we were alone in the salon. Pector and Raleigh had sat down near the fireplace. Irresistibly attracted toward the door, I took a few steps forward, every sense on the alert. With my back to the wall, and through the opening of the door, it was possible to see me. Suddenly I heard a stifled exclamation and these words uttered in French 'Prends garde!' (take care!), then, my name, 'Tragomer.'

"At the same moment the door was closed, and silence reigned. And yet I had not dreamed; this time I was sure I had heard. The two words 'Prends garde' preceding the mention of my name, had been uttered, I could have sworn, by a man's mouth. The whole mysterious affair was developing, and I was in a fever of impatience. Without caring for what my companions might think, I took a step forward to turn the handle and enter the room, when the door opened of itself and Jenny Hawkins made her appearance.

"She approached with a calm smile. Her eyes fell on me first, but without flinching. A careless, graceful expression played on her lips, and she nodded in friendly fashion with that easy bearing characteristic of artists accustomed, like princes trav-



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ersing a crowd, to receive the homage of strangers. On hearing my name pronounced, the singer bowed in my direction with an expression of astonished interest and said gaily to Pector:

“‘Ah! A French gentleman! Rare species in America. Does he speak English?’

“‘Yes, madam,’ I said, ‘badly enough in explaining myself, but well enough to guess your meaning.’

“‘I purposely emphasized the word ‘guess.’ The singer, however, did not appear to understand the threatening import I had given to my reply. She smiled and, stretching out her hand, said:

“‘Delighted, sir, to make your acquaintance.’

“‘I must acknowledge that at that decisive moment there was very little of Léa Pérelli in Jenny Hawkins. Like time-worn portraits, which show forth only the ill-defined features of the model, the resemblance thinned down and the dead woman disappeared, effaced from memory by the living singer. The attitude of the woman before me was not the same as that of the other. The simple gaiety, playful childish gestures which characterized the Italian, were replaced in the American by a cold pride, the grave assurance, and the self-contained bearing of the artist, confident in her public as well as in herself.

“‘Altho I should like it very much, I shall not keep you here long,’ said Jenny Hawkins. ‘I must return to the stage for the last act. How do you like Rovelli? He sang well, did he not? What an artist he is!’

“‘His success was no greater than yours,’ I said;

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'but I find the composer has allotted to him a greater share than to you.'

"'Yes,' she said, making a slight bow. 'This rôle is not the best in my répertoire. If you hear me sing "La Traviata," you will find I shall please you better.'

"'I do not think so,' I replied boldly. 'It would be very painful for me to see you die on the stage.'

"'Why?'

"'Because the sight would bring back to me very poignant memories.'

"She burst out laughing.

"'Ah! All Frenchmen are impressionable and sentimental. What can Verdi's music have in common with your memories of the past?'

"'I will explain, if you like.'

"'It is a pity, but I have no time.'

"'Well,' interrupted Pector, 'will you take supper with us to-night after the performance?'

"'It is very kind of you to ask me, but I shall be too tired. I must take care of my voice.'

"'Well, then,' I asked, 'will you allow me to call on you to-morrow?'

"'Certainly. I am staying at the Hotel des Etrangers, in the Town Hall square. After four o'clock I shall be free. We will talk over a cup of tea.'

## Chapter III

### A TREATY OF ALLIANCE

"I MADE no reply, but bowed. Holding out her hand to my companions and to myself, she conducted us to the door, which she carefully closed. Once out of this woman's actual presence, I regained the power to analyze and to understand. If I had not heard my name, and the few words addressed to Jenny Hawkins by the man who was in her company, whilst we were in the salon, I might have given up the thought of any possible relationship between Léa Pérelli and the singer, but those words I could not forget. Who was this man to whom I was known, and who warned her to 'take care' when I made my appearance? The identity of the two women destroyed by the differences in bearing and expression which I had noticed, and by all the material impossibilities of time, condition, and nationality, as affirmed by Pector, was reestablished by the sole intervention of this unknown man who had pointed me out to Jenny Hawkins evidently as being dangerous. My mind was racked with anguish, and I was devoured by a burning curiosity. I no longer thought of the singer; I wanted to know who was this companion, this Frenchman who knew me, and who, if

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only I could interview him, would be capable of clearing up everything.

"On reaching the hall, Pector asked:

"'Shall we stay?'

"'No,' I said. 'I have a slight headache. I have not been at a similar performance for six months. I can not drive the music out of my head, and imagine a turn in the fresh air would do me good.'

"'Well, then, I will send back the carriage and we will return on foot.'

"After a very short time we were in the street loitering aimlessly along. Chance bringing us to the Town Hall square, I asked:

"'Where is the Hotel des Etrangers?'

"'That large, well-lit façade, right in front. It is not a seventeen-story hotel like those in New York. We have plenty of room here for building purposes. Will you come in? There is an excellent restaurant.'

"Pector possessed the American mania of strolling into public dwellings and going into the bars to eat a sandwich or drink a cocktail. This just suited my fancy. I had formed the plan of waiting for Jenny Hawkins in front of the hotel door, so as to surprise her and her companion. A presentiment told me she would return in his company, and that there, in a second, I should learn this woman's secret. For, without the slightest doubt, there was one. Following my two companions into the interior of the hotel, I sat down with them in front of a table loaded with refreshments. After a moment I summoned the waiter.

"'What time does the theater close?'

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"‘About midnight.’

"‘Thank you.’

"Pector asked me with a smile:

"‘Do you want to keep an eye on Jenny Hawkins?’

"He seemed to have read my thoughts, and I replied:

"‘Well! I should like to see how she looks in ordinary dress, after seeing her on the stage.’

"‘All right! We will wait for you.’

"As luck would have it, I had obtained the liberty of action I wanted. Now, I had only to be lucky enough to meet the singer as she passed. Liberally tipping the porter, he said:

"‘The lady leaves the carriage under the arch, crosses the porch, and mounts this staircase. Her rooms are on the first floor. She will not be long.’

"Raising the collar of my pelisse, I waited under the arch. It was cold that evening, altho we were in April. Smoking a cigar, I walked about and waited. After a few minutes a loud sound of horses pawing the ground and the rolling of wheels told me that the diva’s carriage was approaching. The porter sprang forward to help her to descend. The carriage door opened, and Jenny Hawkins, wrapped in furs, stepped lightly on to the footpath. She looked all around, examining me rapidly, but did not recognize me, for my face was almost invisible behind my turned-up collar, and, addressing some one in the carriage, she said in French:

"‘Come along!’

"As he was preparing to leave the carriage, I took a step forward. Just then I was certain I held the

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key to the mystery. But the man, bending forward his head, saw me and quickly drew back. He said briefly:

“‘Jenny!’

“It was the same voice which had spoken in the dressing-room at the theater. The singer, uneasy, drew near the door, leaned inside, then, turning to the coachman, said:

“‘Union Square.’

“Turning on her heels she entered the porch and disappeared; at the same time the carriage left the courtyard. And, without having succeeded in catching a glimpse of its mysterious occupant, I remained alone.

“Then I returned to where Pector and Raleigh were waiting, and we reached home about half-past twelve.

“The following morning, at breakfast-time, Pector made his way into the dining-room and remarked:

“‘My dear viscount, you certainly have no luck. I have just heard that there will be no performance at the opera to-night. Jenny Hawkins has caught cold, and will not be able to sing. As she is expected the day after to-morrow at Chicago, she will leave at once by the express. Here is a letter addressed to you, doubtless expressing regret at disappointing you.’

“I opened the envelope. On a visiting-card, the corner of which was stamped with the monogram ‘J. H.,’ surrounded by the device ‘Nevermore,’ I read as follows:

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“I am sorry to be deprived of your visit, which I was looking forward to with great pleasure, dear sir, but artists are not always their own masters. To-day I should not have been able to speak to you, owing to hoarseness of the throat. I am leaving for Chicago and New York, where I shall spend a few days. If chance brings us together again, I shall be very happy to renew your acquaintance.

“Yours truly,

“JENNY HAWKINS.”

“This letter threw me into a reverie. My two companions made wild jests on what they called my sentimentality. They could not suspect the poignant anxiety caused me by this sudden departure. All these different incidents, the indisposition—certainly pretended—of the singer, and her determination to escape me, were a confirmation of my suspicions—almost an avowal.

“I reflected profoundly on the situation. If Léa Pérelli, by a concatenation of circumstances, inexplicable to me, was living, after Jacques de Fréneuse had been condemned for having killed her, it was evident that this mystery acted as a cloak to a monstrous iniquity. I firmly determined to clear it up, and to repair the harm which had been done to my unhappy friend. But it was not in America, a vast continent in which Jenny Hawkins was leading a roving life, that I could hope to follow up a track, institute an inquiry, and try to establish the truth. There I was alone, without help or resource, quite disarmed. The crime had been committed in

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France. It was in France that the revision of the trial ought to be prosecuted. And the first precaution to take—the most elementary one—must consist in breaking off all contact with Jenny Hawkins and her mysterious companion. They must be allowed to recover from their alarm, a complete security must be given them, so that the surprise might be the more complete when a favorable moment appeared. And, with this end in view, what was of most importance was that they should hear no further mention of me. Once I had taken this determination, I firmly kept to it. Crossing America, I embarked at New Orleans and reached Paris three weeks ago. During this time I have been busy in gaining a foothold, renewing relations forgotten owing to an absence of eighteen months, and seeking an opportunity to commence hostilities. This opportunity has been furnished me this evening. Now that I have narrated to you my adventure, I ask if you, Marenval, with your great fortune, your taste for whatever is out of the ordinary run of events and the boldness you show, when you like, in combating current opinions, will collaborate with me in restoring an innocent man to freedom and in punishing a guilty one? Besides, my dear friend, it will be no commonplace affair. It will require great *maëstria* to undertake the task, which will not be within the reach of the first comer. And then Jacques is a relative of yours. In the eyes of all Paris you would win a real triumph, if you succeeded. Your name will be handed down in the history of this time, a period remarkable for egotism and —.



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At the end of the nineteenth century, when no one hardly believes in anything, any one who wishes may be a justiciary and a redresser of wrongs. And in all conscience, my dear friend, whoever undertakes the task may be sure that he is playing a unique rôle."

Marenval had listened to Tragomer with passionate attention. Later on, he acknowledged that he had been more absorbed by the recital than by anything else in his life—that a secret voice had whispered in his ear: "Marenval, this is a glorious adventure, and you will receive the credit for it!" When Christian had ended, he regained his power of speech, and burst out like a boiler the valves of which had been too tightly compressed:

"Well, Tragomer, I do not regret the way I have spent my evening! What a tale! You have had a fine inspiration in relating it to me, for I am, in fact, the very man you want. We will maneuver everything all right. I am not to be easily caught; I am accustomed to business, and know human nature. Ah! Tragomer, your blood must have turned cold, on crossing the Atlantic, whilst thinking over it all. But from this day forth we will put the irons in the fire and hasten matters."

Christian interrupted his impetuous companion:

"Prudence above everything: not a single word must be lightly spoken. You have no suspicion of the difficulties we may encounter."

"What! Difficulties? But everybody will help us. Justice, public authority, the Government. As soon as we have serious proofs of error, everybody will be

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anxious to see justice wrought. The only delicate part of the matter is the investigation."

"Everything is delicate," said Tragomer. "Do not rely on the help of justice. The first thought of the judges will be mistrust, the second a determination to resist our efforts. It is never pleasant to acknowledge oneself mistaken. And justice, by profession, will not admit itself subject to error. You know how much time, work, will, and power has been needed to obtain the rare restorations to justice which have been granted by the magistracy; almost all have been obtained by policy. We must not attempt to sell the bear's skin until he is killed. We have five trump cards in hand—your immense fortune, and extensive relations; your firmness and intelligence; I will add, if you permit me, my determination and my will."

"Certainly, my dear Christian!" exclaimed Marenval, grasping the young man's hands. "We shall succeed. I promise to be silent and circumspect. You will have no reproach to bring against me."

"Very good. Listen to me a few minutes longer. I have some additional information to give you. In the first place, Jenny Hawkins is no longer in America; she is en route for England."

"For England! Will she sing there?"

"Yes, at Covent Garden, London. I have learned this the last few days through the English journals. And, lastly, fortune has been kinder than I had expected, giving me precise information relative to the mysterious personage who accompanied the singer at San Francisco."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"You know him?"

"I believe I do. The other evening, at the club, I was playing with some friends at billiards when one of the players at the table next to ours, while lighting his cigarette at the chandelier near him, overturned the lamp-shade, which caught fire. His partner exclaimed excitedly, 'Prends garde!' I started, for I had recognized the voice, the very intonation and accent which had struck me in those very same words I had heard in Jenny Hawkins's room at the theater. Turning sharply round I looked at the one who had just spoken. He had seen me turn, and he was also looking at me. Our eyes met, and at the bottom of his I clearly read the thought, He has recognized me. Pretending to smile, he said gaily:

"'We must not burn the furniture, must we, Tragomer?'"

"And this man," interrupted Marenval, "this member of the club, who treated you so familiarly, was—was——?"

Tragomer changed countenance. The excitement on his face gave way to a dull pallor, and, bending low his head, he said:

"It was Count Jean de Sorège, the intimate friend and companion of Jacques de Fréneuse at the time when he was free and happy."

Marenval struck his hands together, whistled softly in a manner which denoted the most complete disappointment, and finally remarked gloomily:

"Tragomer, that is the very last name I expected to hear. Everything becomes obscure and inexpli-

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cable. How is it possible to suspect Jean de Sorège of having committed the crime? For what reason? Under what pretext? If it is impossible to accuse any one, he is that one. From the very outset we must halt."

"Do not be so quickly discouraged," replied Christian gravely. "Nothing is impossible—nothing is unlikely. You are thinking of Sorège's personality, of his capacity as Jacques's friend. The interest he has had in ruining this innocent man is unknown to you as it is to me. But be sure we shall discover the motives which have prompted him. For it is he, you understand, who was at San Francisco; it is he who is guilty. I will prove it—with difficulty probably, but most unquestionably—I have not the slightest doubt. In order to establish the guilt of an accused person, numerous and evident presumptions are necessary, and in this instance we have not only to prosecute a criminal, we have also to prove the innocence of a condemned man. Accordingly, three times as much certainty is necessary as is required under ordinary circumstances, and this ought to make us the more eager, Marenval. For the more difficult the task the more brilliant the success. Are you still ready to help me?"

"Yes," said Marenval, "whatever happens!"

The Breton looked fixedly at his companion:

"Very good! You are the man I thought you were. We shall succeed."

Taking out his watch, he said:

"It is now one o'clock. We have talked enough for this time. Our treaty of alliance is concluded."

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"I give you my word on it. Any expense I take upon myself. And, if there is any danger——"

"I take that upon myself," said Tragomer.

"Gently!" protested Marenval. "You do not understand me. We will share in equal parts, and I will risk everything with you on equal terms."

"Very well!"

They grasped each other's hand, and, through the inner door, reentered the club.

## Chapter IV

### AN IMPORTANT VISIT

IN Paris may be seen cheerful as well as sad-looking houses, on whose façades may be read melancholy as well as joy; they appear to be made for the express purpose of sheltering pleasure or pain, the very stones possessing a physiognomy like living beings. These houses according as they are attractive or repulsive make one inclined either to inhabit or flee from them. It seems that all the favors of fortune must fall on those who live in the former, whilst every evil humanity is heir to seems to await those who inhabit the latter. The passer-by, impressed by their gloom, hastens his steps when he comes under the disturbing shadow of these abodes of misfortune, and, turning aside his eyes, thinks to himself: "I would not live in that tomb for the world." On the contrary, when he is in front of one of those smiling, coquettish dwellings he looks lingeringly all around, as tho to become impregnated, so to speak, with the favorable influence, and moves away regretfully, saying to himself: "The people who live here must be very happy."

Of all these silent, dismal houses, made for mourning and sadness, there is not one more gloomy and desolate than that situated at No. 47 bis, rue des

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Petits Champs, before the porch of which, on the morning following Christmas Day, Cyprien Marenval's carriage pulled up. The visitor said to the coachman: "Pierre, walk the horse to and fro for a quarter of an hour, he is too hot. I shall stay here a short time. There is a frightful draft in the street."

Turning down the collar of his pelisse he entered the courtyard. Ringing the bell, he perceived, after a moment's interval, an old servant hastening up, and the door opened. The domestic, with astonished surprise, took off Marenval's overcoat, remarking in tones of affectionate familiarity:

"Yes, sir, the ladies are at home; they will be very pleased to see you, sir, after so long an absence."

"They are so low-spirited, my poor Giraud. . . . So sad that it is difficult to bring oneself down to their level. So afflicted that one is afraid when trying to console them of offending them. . . ."

"Yes, sir, that is true," said the old servant, lowering his head. "Their grief is inconsolable."

"But how are they in health?"

"Oh! they enjoy good health, sir. . . . If only their condition of mind were the same. . . . But it is not, sir. No; it is far from satisfactory."

"Well, well, Giraud, we must hope on. Who knows? All that may change."

"Oh, no, sir, impossible to hope. But, I beg your pardon, I will inform the ladies of your visit."

Marenval entered a large drawing-room, full of old-fashioned furniture and tapestry. On the walls

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hung a few interesting pictures, relics of a remarkable collection, of which successive sales had dispersed the most precious canvases.

It was easy to see that the inhabitants were not in the habit of entering this show-room. Nothing was to be found there in the way of objects which might be familiar to two intelligent, active women. Everything was correct and cold. A door opened and the old servant reappeared:

"If you will kindly follow me, I will take you to Madame."

Marenval mounted the great stone staircase, with its forged iron rail, and reaching the stair-head of the first floor, on entering a dark passage, a young lady, dressed in black, advanced to meet the visitor. Old Giraud noiselessly slipped away, and Marenval, slightly uneasy, found himself in front of Mademoiselle de Fréneuse. With a smile she held out her hand. What an expression of heart-breaking melancholy was depicted on that beautiful face! Dark circles surrounded her eyes, too often tear-stained. A brow crowned with light-colored, wavy hair, fastened behind the head without the slightest suspicion of coquetry, gave an expression of incomparable nobility to her haughty face. Marenval looked for a moment at his beautiful niece, sadly shook his head, and said affectionately:

"Well, Mademoiselle Marie, still as unreasonable as ever?"

"Still as unhappy, Monsieur Marenval."

"And your mother?"

"You shall see her at once."



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Whereupon she led the way into a small apartment, a kind of sanctuary in which Madame de Fréneuse had collected everything in any way associated with the memory of her son. Portraits, books, sketches, all recalled to her mind the one she had never ceased lamenting, in spite of his faults, and whom she regretted every day of her life. She arose from a low arm-chair, dressed in mourning, her form bent by reason of her trouble, with pale face and silvery hair; she yet appeared resigned, and thanked Marenval for his visit, like one who did not greatly care to see the tranquillity of her every-day life broken in upon, but yet touched by an action which testified an affectionate memory.

Marenval, after taking a seat, fixed his eyes on a magnificent portrait representing a tall and elegant young man, of frank and pleasant mien. A bitter smile appeared on Madame de Fréneuse's lips. After giving him time to contemplate the canvas at his ease, she said in broken tones:

"That is what he was. What is he now? What have they done to him? For two whole years it has been impossible to obtain his permission to be photographed. . . . He would never consent to our having under our eyes a Jacques with closely shorn hair and beard, and wearing a convict's garb. . . ."

"Do you hear from him?"

"Regularly."

"In what condition is he?"

"From a material point of view he does not complain. He is young and strong, and is, besides, it appears, well treated. . . . Lately he has been en-

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trusted with office work, and his existence is less wretched in consequence. But morally. . . ."

"Does he still maintain that he is innocent?"

At this question the pale face of Madame de Fréneuse flushed, her eyes flashed forth fire, and in a voice quivering with emotion she exclaimed:

"He will declare as long as he lives that he has not committed this atrocious crime. He could not have committed it. Never, Marenval, will my daughter and myself cease to affirm it; there has been a frightful array of overwhelming circumstantial evidence against Jacques. Men may have been mistaken regarding him, and have condemned him quite sincerely, but both his sister and myself will repeat with our last breath that he is innocent."

Marenval looked admiringly at the two ladies, then raising his head he said in firm tones:

"That is my opinion also."

At these words which he now for the first time spoke to the poor mother, Madame de Fréneuse blushed and said with sudden eagerness: .

"Marenval, what is the meaning of this? You have never before been so categorical. More than that, I accused you of not sharing what has always been our deep conviction. You had always appeared to us more humiliated than astonished at what had happened, and now, all of a sudden, you assume a totally different attitude. Marie, look at him, he is no longer the same man; he has changed entirely! Heavens! Can you have some good news to relate? After so great a grief, is it possible that we might. . . ."

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"Do not proceed so fast," interrupted Marenval, rather discontentedly, fearing that he had already said too much. "You were unjust in accusing me of not having had, as you had, faith in Jacques's innocence. You know very well that I defended him with all the energy of one whom the world malignantly united in the catastrophe which overtook you. Yes, at that time I saw in full what human rascality is capable of. Everything that envy, baseness, or wickedness could invent to defame an honorable personality was attempted against myself. I have suffered from your misfortune as much as yourself, for more than a year I have been designated in Parisian society as Marenval, 'Fréneuse's cousin.' Ah! certain boon companions would have liked to insinuate that I deserved the fate of a convict myself. And why? Because I am rich, live luxuriously, possess a fine hotel, a good hunting-box, superb horses, and a box at the Opéra. What is there in all this to make them wish to send me to jail? All the same, I have friends who would like to see me there. Just imagine what all these said about me at the time of our misfortune. I did not pose exactly as a hero, my dear cousin, at that perilous hour. Certainly I might have been more chivalrous, stood up more stoutly by your side, but we must take men for what they are. I am slightly a newcomer in the society among which I live. Only ten years have passed since I gave up business. Consequently I do not receive the same consideration as a Montmorency would receive. Men are equal before the law, but not before society, as I have learned to my cost.

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This explains much which otherwise would remain inexplicable. I am not afraid of confessing to you, for I am conscious of being so devoted to you that some day you will readily pardon my apparent weakness."

Madame de Fréneuse had listened with slightly lowering brow to Marenval's explanations. She half expected to find, in these tardy scruples of her cousin, a reason for that affirmation of Jacques's innocence which had so violently stirred her at the outset. But these few final words seemed a kind of return to that conviction, so unlooked for, and the poor woman felt again overtaken with anxiety.

"Is it simply to make me a profession of faith which touches me very much that you have come to-day?" replied Madame de Fréneuse. "In that case, I should be very grateful to you for this affectionate proof of friendship. Sympathy is all the more precious because it is so rare. And I thank you with all my heart, Marenval, for not abandoning us."

"Abandoning you!" he exclaimed. "Can you have believed me capable of it? I will yet prove to you that I am faithful, brave, and——"

He was stopped by a gesture of Mademoiselle de Fréneuse. More self-possessed than her mother, she had, from the commencement of the interview, studied the attitude of her relative, and had been struck by the embarrassment he had shown. Between the assurance of the actual and the reserve of the past Marenval there was such a want of accord that a long explanation would be necessary to reconcile the two. A more eloquent speaker than the

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ex-manufacturer would have lost his time in the attempt. Luckily for Marenval, however, the daughter, as well as the mother, had retained only the heat of the speech he had just delivered. They had both felt a secret joy, both regained hopes which had long faded away, and Mademoiselle de Fréneuse summed up the situation in a few words:

"My dear cousin, formerly you did not believe in my brother's innocence, and now, owing to some reason we can not guess, you believe in it."

Marenval lifted up his eyes on the two ladies, beaming with delight at being understood, and said:

"You are right; I do believe now that Jacques is innocent. But to believe it is not sufficient; we must prove it. It is quite right that we, in a family gathering, should console ourselves with easily spoken words, but we must not forget that a dazzling rehabilitation must be the sole object of our efforts. You must have thought of this, surely?"

Madame de Fréneuse disconsolately hung down her head.

"In what way could we think of it? The direst extremity of our misfortune is that we are powerless not only to demonstrate the reality of a fact we believe in as earnestly as we believe in God Himself, but even to discuss the possibility of it. For two years we have remained here, crushed beneath the frightful weight of Jacques's condemnation. Besides, if I may dare to confess it to you, Marenval, in order not to doubt my son's innocence, I have been obliged to turn away from an examination of the accusations brought against him, for, to take

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them one by one, they were so grave, so terrible, and convincing that I was reduced to an utter denial of the evidence, which was a terrible punishment for me. Accordingly I took refuge in a kind of fanatical negation, which excludes all reasoning, all light on the subject, and which is the cry of a mother's heart. I do not believe in Jacques's culpability, because he is my child, and my child could never have committed the crime he is reproached with. To all arguments and proofs brought against me, I have always replied from the depth of my conscience: He is my son; he is innocent. But, my dear friend, if I were obliged to demonstrate this innocence, how should I do it? Where should I find the strength of intelligence necessary to break the mass of accumulated proof? How should I convince the judges? Jacques's lawyer himself, after his condemnation, Duranty, who defended the poor child with such passionate eloquence, said to me when I questioned him:

“‘I do not know. When I hear him exclaim that he is not guilty, I believe. When I study the brief, I doubt.’”

“Ah, my dear cousin, no one can deny that the proofs alleged of his guilt were crushing. I was blinded by them, I must confess, as we are now speaking quite frankly to each other. Long have I believed that poor Jacques, maddened and distracted by the need of money, might in an irresponsible moment. . . . Yes, I admitted that he might have been guilty. But ever since yesterday I have entirely changed, and am ardent in affirming

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your son's innocence as I was previously disposed to take for granted his guilt."

"Why since yesterday?" asked Mademoiselle de Fréneuse. "What is this sudden change which has come over you? Who has caused it? Have you become acquainted with some fact such as will throw a new light on the situation? My mother has acknowledged that she has wavered in some slight degree. With me, rest assured, it is not so. When everybody abandoned this unhappy child, I remained faithful to his cause. I have sought, I still seek an explanation of what still remains an impenetrable mystery to me. You may therefore speak, as you will find me quite prepared to listen and to understand you."

Marenval looked tenderly at the young girl.

"Yes, Marie, I know that you took up and maintained a firm stand, and that you dismissed from your affection all who, under those terrible circumstances, appeared not to share your convictions. Last night, I was in the company of a man who loved you tenderly, but whom you rejected without the slightest pity."

The countenance of Mademoiselle de Fréneuse darkened. She stood upright, appearing taller than was her wont, while a quiver passed over her lips. Tho she did not utter a word, her whole bearing expressed disdain mingled with grief.

"I am speaking of Christian de Tragomer," added Marenval.

He stopped, so different from what he expected was the effect produced by this name.

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"I guessed you were speaking of Monsieur de Tragomer," said Mademoiselle de Fréneuse coldly. "Well, my dear cousin, I should be infinitely obliged to you if you would never speak to me of him. My mother and myself have effaced him from our minds as he had effaced us from his heart. At the very time we needed all our friends he set the example of defection. It is he, I may confess, whose abandonment during that time of sadness affected us the most. He was my fiancé. He was ashamed of me. I know him no more."

"He still loves you," said Marenval eagerly.

"I am very glad of it," replied Mademoiselle de Fréneuse forcibly; "and may he suffer in consequence."

She passed her hand over her brow, turned toward her mother, who was listening in silence, and, kneeling by her side, said:

"I beg your pardon. I have turned into another channel the confidential information Monsieur Marenval was imparting, and which you were so impatiently awaiting. It shall not happen again."

"My dear child," said Marenval kindly, "we shall often have an opportunity of seeing each other, for we are about to undertake what may be a long campaign. We must not be too hasty with regard to either circumstances or persons. Several matters will be cleared up, several conditions explained. You do not wish me to speak of Tragomer just now. Later on you will ask me yourself, perhaps—who knows?—to bring him to you. When you know what he has already done, and what he is disposed to



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do to serve you, you will be more indulgent. Know, in any case, that he is the cause of my presence here now. I had no idea of undertaking anything for our unhappy Jacques, I must humbly confess, when Christian overwhelmed me by such unexpected information that it has been impossible for me to remain indifferent."

"In Heaven's name, what has he discovered?" asked Madame de Fréneuse in such a tone of anguish that her daughter took her by the arm to calm her.

Marenval shook his head with an air of importance.

"My dear cousin, do not ask me any questions, as I am not free to speak. Possible success will be obtained only at the cost of absolute discretion. One imprudent word might compromise everything. Hope on, fortune has never been so favorable. But be willing to proceed blindly along the path we are about to open out to you."

"Ah! If salvation is to be obtained at that price, I consent to any trial you may impose upon me. For two years I have been living in a tomb. Thanks to you, a feeble ray of light is now entering. May Heaven bless you for the consolation you now give me!"

"If I am not permitted to speak of our newly revived hopes, my dear cousin, there are, nevertheless, certain things concerning which I must obtain information from you. In the interest of our common success, I now ask you to reply to me quite openly."

"Question me. My memory is less retentive than formerly, but what I may have forgotten my daughter will certainly be capable of recalling to mind."

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"Amongst your son's friends there was one more intimate than the rest, one who had been brought up with him: Count Jean de Sorège."

Madame de Fréneuse replied eagerly: "Yes, Jean de Sorège. . . . A charming young man, of excellent family. I was very fond of his mother, whom he unluckily lost when quite young. . . . He had grown up with Jacques. The two children scarcely ever left each other during their childhood. What finally separated them were the fresh relations which did so much harm to my son."

"The Count de Sorège, I suppose, was not one of Jacques's bad companions?"

"On the contrary, he did all he could to separate him from them; it was through hatred and disgust of these companions that, to my great regret, he abandoned my son, for the influence he had over him could be none other than the very best."

"Then you would look upon Monsieur de Sorège as a good companion for Jacques?"

"The best he could have had."

"Was the young man rich?"

"No. That was the very reason he left my son, as he was not in a position to incur the same expenses as Jacques, and would not run into debt to maintain the same style of living. . . . That was the beginning of the downfall."

"Pardon me if I insist rather particularly on questions concerning Monsieur de Sorège, but it is absolutely necessary. When your son made the acquaintance of this wretched woman who brought about his

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ruin—this Léa Pérelli—was Monsieur de Sorège still friendly with him? ”

“Certainly. There were even very violent scenes between Monsieur de Sorège and Jacques regarding this woman. The Count Jean did everything in his power to induce him to break with her. He even wrote telling him that she was unfaithful, and offered to prove his statements.”

“Is this letter still in evidence?”

“It was given up to the authorities by myself, and is in all probability in the brief. It had been found by our old servant in Jacques's bedroom. The result was a violent quarrel between my son and his friend. They were on the point of deciding it by a duel when mutual friends settled the matter.”

“Has your son never manifested any feeling of bitterness or hostility against his former friend? Has he never suspected that Sorège might have had evil intentions?”

“Not to my knowledge. Still, altho I had perfect confidence in and sympathy with Monsieur de Sorège, I must also confess that in my household everybody did not think in the same way.”

“Who was of a different opinion?”

“First of all, my daughter, who had an antipathy toward him from the commencement; then old Giraud, my servant, who could never endure him.”

“Ah! Mademoiselle Marie found her brother's friend a suspicious personage?”

“Do not make me say what I do not think,” replied Mademoiselle de Fréneuse eagerly. “Under no pretext would I like to prejudice you against the

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Count de Sorège. His disposition did not please me, that is all."

"What kind of disposition had he, in your opinion, Mademoiselle Marie?"

"He showed himself always haughty and fond of raillery, and I can not bear a man of that stamp. He made his calculations with perfect self-possession, and never undertook anything without reckoning all the consequences. Above everything, he was practical. The very reverse of poor Jacques, who never reflected, and flung himself into difficulties without the least idea how to extricate himself. I blamed the giddiness of the one whilst regretting the excessive precautions of the other. There was excess on both sides, and if my brother appeared to be mad, Monsieur de Sorège gave me the idea of being too clever."

"Even to the extent of trickery?"

"I can not say, my dear cousin. I am only giving you my impression. I never knew anything of Monsieur de Sorège's conduct in private life except what I heard from my brother, and in my presence he could not speak freely. Accordingly, my impressions are not confirmed by facts. But they are very distinct in my mind, and have never changed."

Marenval looked at Mademoiselle de Fréneuse and said:

"This judgment can not be considered an unfavorable one during the times in which we are living. Too clever a man would appear, justly enough, exceptionally calculated to succeed nowadays. But I see that my cousin is judging Monsieur de Sorège

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from a special point of view, that of a gentleman, not a man of business. And that renders her blame perfectly comprehensible. Well, let us sum up. To Madame de Fréneuse Monsieur de Sorège was a gentleman whom she was sorry to see quarreling with her son. To Mademoiselle de Fréneuse he was cold-blooded, bent on getting out of a scrape under any circumstance, tho he ruined his friend in the process."

"But why all these questions?" asked Madame de Fréneuse.

"We were to be questioned, my dear mother," said the young girl, "not informed. Let us be patient."

Madame de Fréneuse assumed a smile of resignation and Marenval arose.

"My dear cousin," he said in tones of deep affection, "I am leaving you now, but I shall return before long. We shall see each other frequently. That will be necessary, and will not, I hope, displease you. I should like to enlighten you on the situation, but, first of all, I must obtain information myself. With your permission I will have a few words with Giraud."

## Chapter V

### AN IMPORTANT WITNESS

As Marenval shook hands with Madame de Fréneuse, Marie rang the bell, and, opening the door herself, conducted their unexpected ally through the unfurnished apartments into the vestibule. As the old servant came running up she looked with steadfast eyes at Marenval and said:

"Whatever be the issue, my dear cousin, I thank you for the renewed hope you have given us. I shall never forget that you have been the first to share with us the conviction we have always had of my brother's innocence."

He shook his head and said:

"That would not be just, for the first one who has shared this conviction with you is not named Marenval, but Tragomer."

Mademoiselle de Fréneuse frowned, gave a final affectionate wave of the hand, and without a word retraced her steps to her mother.

Giraud held up his pelisse for Marenval.

"A moment, my good fellow; I have a few questions to ask you before I leave. Where shall we be free from any possibility of being disturbed?"

"If Monsieur will follow me into the small parlor there is no danger of any one coming there. Mari-

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ette is in the kitchen, and the maid is on the second floor arranging the linen. I am at your orders, sir. No fear of disturbance. A door-keeper's duty here is a sinecure, for it is as quiet as a tomb."

Marenval leaned against the mantelpiece, not caring to take a seat whilst this old white-haired servant was on his feet in front of him. The self-made millionaire was very delicate in such matters, and always gentle toward the humble. He said:

"Giraud, I wish to speak to you of your young master and of one of his friends. There are things well known to servants in a household, and yet quite unsuspected by the parents. I have been questioning these ladies, now I want to question you also. Give your answers quite frankly, omitting nothing."

"Oh, sir, you may rely upon my relating all I know. I have nothing to fear and nothing to lose. What wrong could I suffer greater than that I had to bear the day I saw Monsieur Jacques taken away? A child I had brought up, a little fellow who climbed on my knees in his childhood days, for whom I went to school every Sunday to bring him home for the day. Ah, sir, the world is full of wickedness, and the best men do not receive the best treatment."

"Then you, too, were convinced of Monsieur de Fréneuse's innocence?"

"Convinced, sir? That is not the word. I would be willing to put my head on the block if he had anything to do with it. One had only to see him from the moment that brute of a policeman put hands on him to be certain that he had done nothing and that he did not even know what they wanted

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with him. If I had obeyed my first impulse, I and Michael, the coachman, would have thrown down the policeman into the cellar, and kept him there until Monsieur Jacques had been set at liberty. Had he been free he would have known how to defend himself, he would have proved that he had not killed the woman. He, sir, kill a woman! He who would have flung himself into the water to save a drowning dog. Impossible to imagine anything so stupid. Kill this woman! For what reason? She loved him. To rob her? What was the use? She had given him all she possessed. Oh, she was jealous enough of him. One evening when she had come here to speak to him, she seemed like one demented, so great was her grief. She remained seated in the hall near the large bench for more than half an hour, weeping like a Magdalen. She offered me whatever I would take, her purse, a diamond ring, if only I would permit her to enter Monsieur Jacques's room. It was useless for me to say to her, 'He is not at home, Madame; what advantage would you gain by seeing his room? You might meet one of the ladies—his mother or his sister. What a scandal! No, you must not think of it.' She burst into sobs and said: 'Oh, I would rather kill myself.' Yes, sir, she said that, and I have always been convinced that she did kill herself. I told all this to the examining magistrate. He merely shrugged his shoulders. That was evidently not his opinion. And as I returned to my guns, explaining my reasons, he very coolly cut me short, stating that he considered me to be making tiresome repetitions. I was doing nothing



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of the kind, sir, and as true as I am sixty-five years of age without even having injured a living being, Monsieur Jacques did not kill that woman. No, he did not kill her!"

Marenval had listened attentively to the old man. He had retained the virtue of patience from his former profession, and never offended any one. He knew what it meant to await the pleasure of the client, that after much hesitation and feeling one's way a stroke of business is effected. He was on the lookout for some unforeseen detail, some fresh circumstance in old Giraud's passionate recital. All he had just heard he knew already, so he decided to approach the subject he wished to have light thrown upon.

"What influence, in your opinion, had Jacques's friends and associates upon his character?"

"Oh, sir, it is very difficult to judge that. Monsieur Jacques's conditions of life were very peculiar. He lived with his mother, who was a widow, and there was his sister at home. Accordingly, he could not receive here to any great extent. No one knew what friends he had besides Monsieur de Tragomer and Monsieur de Sorège. The rest he saw at the club, the theaters, the race-courses, in society, in short. As you know, sir, Monsieur Jacques was very popular. So agreeable and handsome a young fellow was invited everywhere. And he readily accepted whatever gay party or dinner was going. He was full of spirits; in fact, all these mad acts which ended in his ruin he inherited from his father. A terrible man, sir, Jacques's father. You knew him well

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the last few years of his life. Ah, sir, Madame had very little happiness during her married life. Had not Mademoiselle Marie, a real saint as she is, redeemed the faults of the rest by love and tenderness, Madame would certainly have been living the life of a martyr."

Marenval gently brought him back to the subject.

"I shall not question you on Monsieur de Tragomer. He is a man who has concealed nothing from me, and who is worthy in every way. But I should like to know your opinion on Monsieur de Sorège."

Giraud hesitated a moment. But he had promised to say what he thought, and he kept his word.

"Saving the respect due to a superior, sir, he is a villain."

"What grounds have you for treating him so harshly?" asked Marenval, rather astonished at such outspoken vehemence.

"None, sir. I have never seen him commit a faulty action; never heard him say anything wrong. All the same, it is my firm conviction that he is a villain."

"Still, Giraud, why are you so severe on this young man, who, as you confess, has never done anything to justify such a judgment?"

"It is instinctive, sir, I can not discuss it. Just across the street is a tobacco-dealer whose shop I have frequented for ten years for the purpose of buying snuff. I could never accustom myself to his face. He would make overtures to shake hands with me; I could never do it. Everybody esteemed the man, and he had a good reputation in the neighbor-

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hood. Well, sir, three months ago he absconded with government money, and dreadful revelations came to light afterward. The whole district was scandalized, no one could reconcile himself to the idea that so apparently honest a man could be such a thorough scoundrel. You may scarcely believe me, sir, but from my point of view Monsieur de Sorège was the same type of man as the tobacco-dealer. He always showed himself very polite, obliging even toward me, but in his face there was an indescribable expression which repelled me, and causes me to say even now, without the slightest hesitation, that he is a villain, and will some day be recognized as such."

"Did he come here often?"

"Oh, yes, sir. At first rather strange notions presented themselves to me from that very fact. I imagined he intended to marry Mademoiselle Marie. But his attentions in that direction soon changed shape, and he gave way in favor of Monsieur de Tragomer. The truth was, you see, that he saw the family fortune rapidly dwindling. He was sufficiently well versed in his friend's acts of folly—perhaps encouraged them too much—to have the faintest illusion as to the future of these ladies. He had not the least doubt that Jacques had brought them also into financial straits. Altho I believe in his innocence, sir, I have never been blinded, and am perfectly aware that a great deal of blame attaches itself to him. Poor boy! When the fatal day came, he was sufficiently reproached for all these backslidings. All his past life weighed heavily, indeed, on him when the time for justification came. Sorège

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knew that both his mother and sister would give all they had to prevent their good name being compromised by a disgraceful action. And as poor Jacques had fallen into the hands of sharpers, his fate was easy to guess. Alas, sir, time was not left him to ruin the whole family! Fate ordained matters otherwise. And yet, for my own part, I am certain his mother and sister would rather be reduced to beggary than see this poor boy in his present position."

"There is no doubt whatever on that point, Giraud. To return to Monsieur de Sorège, his relations with Jacques were less frequent toward the end? They saw less of each other?"

"Yes, sir, here, but in the outside world I do not know. In my opinion, the Count de Sorège, in spite of his apparently perfect behavior, has been my master's evil genius. He flung him into difficulty and embarrassment and gave him very bad advice. Oh, yes! I am quite sure of it, for he was overjoyed at seeing him sink lower and lower. Why it was so I do not know, but he had some reason or other for wishing to effect Jacques's ruin. It is not for a poor servant like myself to divine the thoughts of my superiors. But when one is always receiving orders, attending to the service, one sees and hears a great deal. Then one reflects, puts sentences together, remembers the expression depicted on faces, and finally forms such convictions in one's mind as become invariable. One evening, sir, when this poor boy's affairs were in a terrible pass, Monsieur de Sorège was with him in the smoking-room. I

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had left the room to bring in the tea, and on my return found them so excited that they paid no attention to my presence there. Besides, Monsieur Jacques took very little pains to conceal what he did—he was no hypocrite, like the other. I heard my young master say in passionate tones: ‘Yes, this kind of existence is becoming intolerable. I shall leave Paris or blow my brains out.’ Oh, sir, if you had seen Monsieur de Sorège’s face. He pinched his lips as tho in disapproval, but his eyes sparkled with joy. Yes, contentment fairly leaped from his eyes. And his friend was telling him that he had reached the end! Oh! That evening I seemed to feel myself the hatred lurking in his heart. Why did he detest my master? What had Monsieur Jacques done to him? He was so light-hearted, so mad and imprudent that he was quite capable of wounding a friend’s feelings, without either wishing or knowing it. I should like to have heard the end of their conversation, but Monsieur Jacques was waiting for me to leave the room before speaking again. He walked to and fro while I arranged the tea service on the table, striding like a tiger up and down the smoking-room. His face was pale as death, his hands clasped tightly together. Oh, sir, that evening something very serious was the matter, for usually Monsieur Jacques did not take things seriously. As I was closing the door Monsieur de Sorège resumed the conversation and said: ‘You are mad, my poor Jacques! You have Léa. Is she not sufficient for you?’ Then I had to shut the door without hearing the rest. That occasion was the

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only one in my life when I felt a great inclination to listen at the door, altho such a proceeding would be unworthy of a servant with any self-respect. However, habits of discretion gained the upper hand, and I went away without learning what it would doubtless have been interesting indeed to know, for they were speaking of that Léa who ruined Monsieur Jacques, so mad was he over her. If I understood aright at the moment, what Monsieur de Sorège meant was that my young master had become involved in a new intrigue with another woman. He already had Léa, and was thinking of burdening himself with another. Heavens! Had he not enough with the Italian, through whose fingers money slipped like water, who had turned Jacques into a gambler to profit by his gains and leave him alone to his losses. Ah, sir, she was a wicked woman. And who knows to what extremity such a one will lead a young man who is both weak and vain! We, sir, know it to our sorrow."

"What was Monsieur de Sorège's attitude at the moment of the catastrophe?"

"Very correct, sir."

"In what way?"

"Well, sir, he did not appear to be excited. He came immediately and professed himself willing to undertake any service for Madame. He was cold and self-possessed, but his whole bearing smacked of the artificial—there was nothing natural about him. You would have imagined him to be an actor, sir; but I do not know if I make myself well understood or not?"

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"Yes, perfectly."

"As for Monsieur de Tragomer, he acted almost like a madman; he could not find a word to say, while Monsieur de Maugiron wept like a child. They had all taken leave of their wits, but Monsieur de Sorège kept a cool head through it all. He asked me for the keys, and made a long search in Jacques's drawers. But a thorough examination had been made by the commissary of police, and there was nothing to glean. It was especially a photograph he seemed desperately anxious to find. He asked me for information about it—a large carte photo in Jacques's cigar-drawer, one which I must have noticed. I told him I knew where it was. Monsieur Jacques had taken it out the previous night and placed it in his traveling-case. Scarcely had I time to point it out to him than he sprang across the room, tore open the case, and cut the photo into a score of tiny pieces before I had time to prevent him. But I had no thought of doing so. The photograph of a woman! How rare and precious it would have been when everything was crumbling to ruin, with these ladies half dead, and the journals heaping pages of abuse on my unhappy master! Since then I have thought of Monsieur de Sorège's anxiety to destroy the photograph, and been greatly puzzled about it. But I could not understand what his motive was in acting as he did. Perhaps it was in Monsieur Jacques's interest after all. It might, however, have been a personal interest. That I never could discover. After these proofs of sympathy to Madame de Fréneuse at the first, Monsieur

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de Sorège discontinued his visits by degrees. I do not reproach him for doing so, as the rest did the same. He pleaded my master's cause at the trial with considerable warmth. So far as I could learn—for I was not present the whole time—he did his best to prove him innocent, or to attenuate, at any rate, his responsibility. In short, everybody approved his conduct, and Madame thanked him warmly. Great good may it do him. Since then we have seen nothing more of him, and all this happened two years ago. Living alone and amid such sorrow my poor brain is enfeebled. Doubtless I have forgotten all the circumstances; besides, I can not put my ideas into good order. But what overrules everything, sir, is the fact that Monsieur de Sorège was not sincere as a friend; that he made my master jealous, and that when he saw he was ruined he only pretended an eagerness to save him because he was absolutely certain he would not succeed."

The old man ceased speaking. His hands were trembling with emotion, and great tears were coursing down his cheeks. He stood there in front of Marenval, who was thinking profoundly. Finally, seeing that the millionaire asked no further questions, he made bold to ask him one.

"Would you permit me, sir, to ask for what reason you wish to recall this sorrowful past? Assuredly it is not from curiosity, or for the pleasure of stirring up such sad memories. Can it be that you hope to effect a change in the situation, sir?"

Marenval looked at the old servant with an in-



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terest he had never previously manifested, placed his hand on his shoulder and said:

"One never knows what may happen, my good Giraud. Nothing in this world is certain except death. Your master is alive. They even say he is in good health."

"Oh, sir, he was so young and vigorous! But grief and repentance wear one out. Then there is the climate?"

"Not unhealthy at all, Giraud. As for the information I have come to gather here with regard to Monsieur de Sorège, it was indispensable to me, as this young man is shortly to be married."

"Married! Ah, Monsieur de Sorège to be married! I am but a poor man, sir, and Monsieur de Sorège is a count, with a fortune, relations, and everything. And yet, if I had a daughter, sir, I should prefer to have her die an old maid rather than give her in marriage to such a man."

Marenval burst into a laugh.

"Rest assured, I think the matter has fallen through. Many thanks for your confidence in me, Giraud. All you have told me may be of service."

He put on his fur-lined overcoat, gave the old servant a friendly nod of the head, and left the house. Reaching his carriage, he ordered the coachman to conduct him to Monsieur de Tragomer's hotel. It was four o'clock. The brougham rolled along to the cadenced trot of the horse, and Marenval, seated in the corner of the carriage, began to reflect on all the contradictory remarks he had heard respecting the individual who so interested him.

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On the one hand, Madame de Fréneuse considered Monsieur de Sorège as a thorough gentleman who had never exercised any influence other than favorable over her son. On the other, Mademoiselle Marie declared that her brother's friend had always been displeasing to her; that she looked upon him as clever and unscrupulous rather than loyal. Then, lastly, the opinion, given by the confidential Giraud, in spite of all the old man's tiresome repetitions, was more serious and really affecting. The latter, as he said, had been well placed for both seeing and judging. If no man is a hero to his valet—*à fortiori*, there is no apparent wisdom or artificial kindness for the servant who sees and hears everything.

Giraud had, of necessity, been a faithful observer, both of his master and his master's friends. They had all been thoroughly sifted by him, and the conviction he had formed was bound to be the one most justified. And besides, how probable were the details he related with regard to Sorège's relationship with Jacques. Given what Marenval already suspected, how many particulars now threw light on the conduct of Jacques's friend! It was not possible to understand yet; the main lines of the adventure were beginning to appear.

Sorège, there was not the slightest doubt, was implicated in the affair. In what way? That was the dark part of it all; that was the adventure itself. In what had happened two years previously, there had been circumstances difficult to explain, even tho the identity of Léa Pérelli had not been contested. But now? Here was something incomprehensible.

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Then all the protests Jacques had uttered, to which no one had paid the slightest attention, returned to Marenval's memory.

When Jacques had been arrested, he was at Havre. He had never clearly explained why he had gone there. Neither was it known why he had remained there twenty-four hours instead of taking the steamer and embarking for America. For whom was he waiting? The prosecution said: "An accomplice." But what accomplice? It had been impossible to find one. Was it Sorège? Marenval pondered, but no reasonable answer came. If Sorège had been an accomplice, then who was the woman found dead in the Rue Marbeuf? For he could not lose sight of the fact that a crime had been committed, and that, if Léa Pérelli was living, another had been killed in her stead.

But what other, and who was the assassin? Here no solution could be found. For if, strictly, one considered the interest Jacques might have had in striking Léa, it was no longer possible to understand why he should have struck another woman. Cyprien, whose inventive faculties were dormant, loyally strove to solve the enigma, but he could find no solution. He was sure there was a mystery, but did not consider himself clever enough to unravel it.

His practical turn of mind, however, brought before him all the difficulties he was about to meet with in so light-hearted a fashion and all the worry which might result therefrom. At his age, with everything to make life happy—an immense fortune, good health, agreeable society, and amiable friends

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he was dreaming of flinging himself recklessly into a rehabilitation scheme of a very problematic nature, simply because an audacious friend of his had inflamed his imagination and pointed out what a fine rôle he might play. Was not the fine rôle, he thought, to live as agreeably as possible and avoid all kinds of complications? Life was easy and smooth, must it be rendered intolerable by a succession of excitement and agitation? Was it not better to drift gently down the stream than to row furiously and to land on banks bristling with ambuscades and perils of every description?

While these few minutes lasted in which the reasoning of the man of pleasure gave him such selfish counsel, Marenval was greatly perplexed. He regarded his destiny with perfect clearness, reasoned before venturing on any enterprise, and, to his great credit, he now decided in favor of the unknown peril, when a single word would have assured him tranquillity for life. A generous impulse won the victory. Jacques's mother and sister, in the solitude and hopelessness of their retreat, appeared in his mind, as he had just left them, and at the same time, unhappy Jacques banished thousands of leagues distant, suffering pain and outrage and bowed beneath the burden of an unmerited shame.

As tho by enchantment, all his club friends, all his companions in private life, the fine young ladies of the aristocracy, who cast only indifferent regards in his direction, seeming to estimate at a very low price the millionaire dealer he had formerly been; the ravishing girls who looked upon him as a

## IN DEEP ABYSS

generous uncle, but without the deference he would have liked to see them give. All appeared to his imagination as in the scene of a play, and all these arbiters of success and fame seemed to direct their looks toward him as tho to ask:

“What will he decide to do? Will he undertake the cause of the oppressed, or will he sacrifice innocence to his idleness? Shall we have the opportunity of including him in the list of those personalities who attract attention as soon as they appear anywhere, or shall we continue to treat him as an upstart. In short, shall we look upon him as a hero or a coward?”

Before this question Marenval started, the blood rushed to his face, he pressed his hands tightly together and said aloud, as tho replying to all these inquisitive, railing, or benevolent persons who were watching to judge him without appeal:

“I have been ridiculed and scorned; well, they shall see what Marenval is capable of. Whatever comes of it, I will go to the bottom of this affair and throw light into it, exactly as I would into a business account.”

The carriage halted at that moment. He thought: There is no drawing back now. I have given my word to myself. We will see what Tragomer will think of the news I am bringing him. Whereupon he alighted from the brougham.

## Chapter VI

### BEHIND A MASK

MARENVAL's ally, on his side, had not been inactive. Since his return from his trip round the world he had been fully occupied by the cares and worries of a re-installment in the capital. A rich young bachelor of good family and a member of the principal clubs does not camp in Paris like a stranger who passes there only six months at a time. A suite of rooms had to be found, arranged to suit his taste, furniture provided, horses brought, and servants engaged.

Tragomer the last few weeks had lived anyhow, settling business matters, eating at the club, visiting his relations and a few intimate friends. The dinner party at which he had met Marenval was his first appearance in Parisian society. He had been taken there by Maugiron, and had no suspicion of the strange consequences of the feast at which he had assisted in quite an unpremeditated fashion.

But the Breton nobleman, calm and tenacious, from the moment he had come to an agreement with Marenval had had only one aim in view: to succeed in the enterprise proposed. The very next morning he had entered on the campaign. For two years he had heard nothing of Sorège. Their intimacy had ceased quite naturally after the condemnation of

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Fréneuse, since Jacques had been the bond which united them to one another. He had seen the count apparently greatly affected at their friend's misfortune, bewailing the folly which had led him to this catastrophe, defending him with generous warmth against the condemnation of the indifferent. Then he had left Paris and France, and he had lost all trace of Sorège.

At the club they met, exchanged the usual greetings, and separated in opposite directions. An icy coldness existed between these two men, who had for years lived side by side on the most familiar terms, and yet now could scarcely speak to each other, as tho inspired by a mutual hate. Still, Tragomer had no hostile feelings against Sorège. He had never liked him, even when they were Jacques's companions. The open, frank nature of the one had no sympathy with the cold, calculating temperament of the other. Sorège had always been very reserved with Tragomer, and when the latter mentioned this fact to their mutual friend, Jacques replied with a smile:

"Never mind, you must take Jean as he is, you will not change him. He is a diplomat, and never says what he thinks."

It was this very fact that Sorège never spoke with frankness that occasioned Tragomer's coolness toward him. Often had he said to Fréneuse, who reproached him for holding himself aloof:

"Well! I can not help it. It is impossible for me to be at ease with him. I always imagine I am in the presence of some one wearing a mask."

## BEHIND A MASK

"Then you have at hand a companion ready found for the opera ball!" Jacques replied gaily, jesting about everything, and never having any leisure to observe the character of his companions.

All the same, it was impossible not to render justice to Sorège, and Tragomer was obliged to acknowledge that Jacques's friend was thoroughly well bred, of agreeable appearance, very brave, as he had proved on different occasions, and trustworthy in counsel whenever he was consulted on a difficult matter. He was close on thirty years of age, was of average height, auburn hair and beard, and eyes well covered by the lids giving a close kind of aspect to his appearance. Whenever he remained silent, with veiled look gliding imperceptibly between the lids, it was impossible to guess his thoughts.

Tragomer found him just as he had left him, after two years' absence, with the same calm and collected countenance, the same precise and reserved language. He wondered whom he might ask for information concerning the person suspected without fear of arousing curiosity or provoking indiscretion. Maugiron, he concluded, was the very man, one of those Parisian ferrets who intrude themselves in everywhere, know everything, and guess the rest.

A companion from childhood, standing on no kind of ceremony with him, and sure of a hearty welcome, Tragomer set out about half-past eleven o'clock from his rooms in the Rue Rembrandt and walked to the Boulevard Malesherbes, where Maugiron lived, almost at the corner of the Madeleine



## IN DEEP ABYSS

**Square.** It was the latter's invariable custom to lunch at home.

"If, even amid the greatest gastronomic excesses, you desire to keep yourself in good condition, lunch every morning at home. There you will eat moderately, and it is that which will save you." Such was his theory.

Altho resolved never to depart from this rule, still he did not go so far as to advocate lunching alone. He was always at home at noon, and almost every day the bell would ring and a man's or woman's voice would be heard saying:

"Good morning, Maugiron, I have come to eat moderately with you!"

Then the wise hygienist would order the best wine to be brought up from the cellar, and, as tho by chance, a delicate and plentiful *ménu* appeared, to which his guest and himself did due honor. That was what he called "keeping himself in good condition." This morning Mariette de Fontenoy, entering with Laurence Margillier, saw Tragomer smoking a cigarette in Maugiron's study.

"Where is the master?" said Laurence, flinging her hat on to the divan and giving Tragomer a kiss.

"He is putting a flower in his coat. Well, Mariette, is that all you have to say to me? Your friend, you notice, is more expansive than yourself."

"Oh! she forms part of the house, and does the honors. Still, my dear Christian, if a kiss will satisfy you," said the beautiful girl, "I have always the wherewithal to give you pleasure."

## BEHIND A MASK

She flung her arms round the Breton's neck, then turning round on her heels:

"How hungry I am!" she exclaimed.

"Come along, then, my children; lunch is served!" exclaimed Maugiron, entering the room. "The buttered eggs and truffles have just come. We must eat them hot." Thereupon they passed into the dining-room, where the taste for luxury of the Sybaritic host was revealed by the fine crystal and porcelain, and the rich plate of which the service was composed.

## Chapter VII

### A BATTLE OF WITS

"Good morning," said Laurence, "I hope you slept well after last night's disturbance. You were beautifully tipsy after dinner."

"I?" said Maugiron. "I was as fresh as a rose. It was Tragomer who launched forth. What tales he told us, the monster!"

"Ah! Told us, indeed. He took Marenval into his confidence. As for the rest of us——"

"Do not speak for us; we finished the evening at the Olympia. La Rustigieri danced with her throat and sang with her feet. Evviva l'Italia! I have hardly stopped laughing at it yet."

"Give us back Loie Fuller."

"No, no. It hurts one's eyes to watch her."

A brief interval of silence followed. They were tasting a bottle of Château Yquem, to which Maugiron had called the attention of his guests, and which they fully appreciated. Tragomer, who generally drank water, said to the host:

"Your cider is pretty good. By the by, I met Sorège yesterday; he seemed to have a very grave expression on his face. Has anything wrong happened?"

## A BATTLE OF WITS

"You may well ask that; he is about to marry."

A general exclamation of surprise followed.

"What is the use of ridiculing marriage nowadays? You must take care, Maugiron."

"Marriage," said Mariette, "is an institution which ought to be carefully maintained. In the first place, because but for it there would be a dreadful number of bachelors; in the second place, because spend-thrifts of good family would otherwise have no means of restoring their ruined fortunes; and, finally, because the young ladies of America would lose a serious opening for their market."

"Mariette is a wonderful girl. Why do you not write to the *Vie Parisienne*?"

"I pity the editor too much."

"So Sorège is to be married?" resumed Tragomer, who did not wish the conversation to drift away into other channels.

"There has been a rumor abroad to that effect for some time."

"And who is the lady?"

"One of those American girls with whom Mariette is so justly preoccupied, Miss Maud Harvey, of Minneapolis. The father is a great cattle-breeder who has made an immense fortune; his sons are following in his steps."

"But Julius Harvey lives in Paris. It is he who built that fine hotel in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne."

"He can well afford it. In the American journals his fortune is spoken of as one of the greatest in the New World."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"And Miss Harvey, what is she like?"

"Small and dark-complexioned. There is Mexican blood in the race. It is said that the mother was a half-breed. She stays at Minneapolis; never comes to Paris. As for the young girl, she is rather eccentric. The cool-headed Sorège will have his work cut out for him."

"When was this marriage decided on?"

"Oh! negotiations were commenced long ago, but they are dragging somewhat. Jean has been maneuvering round that dark little pony for more than six months. But she appears difficult to bridle. A journey to America was necessary to bring matters to a head."

"A journey to America?"

"Yes, her father took Sorège to see his property last year. He said to him, 'Come and see my cattle,' and Jean took the steamer with the young lady."

Tragomer did not continue his investigations any further. He knew the important point; Sorège had been to America. That was the main thing. At the very moment he imagined he had recognized the voice in Jenny Hawkins's room at San Francisco Sorège was in America; accordingly, his presence became likely, and all the conjectures resulting therefrom received a sudden strengthening power. All Tragomer had hoped for was being realized. The suspicions he had conceived were no longer whimsical; they were based on a real foundation. Sorège was present in America; accordingly, there could be no plea of an alibi. That America was immense

## A BATTLE OF WITS

availed nothing. It was sufficient for Tragomer that Sorège had crossed the Atlantic for the certainty of his being the mysterious individual at San Francisco to be indisputable. There was no other Frenchman who could have pronounced his name under similar circumstances.

There, however, Christian's deduction chain ceased. The fact that Sorège had passed through San Francisco at the same period as himself, that he had been surprised by him speaking to Jenny Hawkins did not prove him a criminal. And yet, suppose Jenny Hawkins were Léa Pérelli? At that point, Tragomer found himself in front of a deep abyss which he tried to fathom in vain. He tried to guess the depth of the abyss, the horrors it concealed, but he could distinguish nothing. Dense black mists utterly impenetrable filled it.

He reflected: "This task is only a matter of time. Shall I pretend, from the very outset, to throw light on so difficult and complicated a problem, one on which men of good faith, competent and wise judges, have already tried their skill, without finding a true solution to it? If Sorège is guilty, if he is an accomplice, if he is merely in possession of the truth and has allowed it to be so outrageously warped, he must have had some grave interest in doing so. Besides, such a perfect master of himself as he is, clever and calculating, par excellence, must have taken every precaution against a surprise. It will accordingly be extremely difficult to unmask him. But he went to America, passed through San Francisco, and showed himself exceedingly anxious, not perhaps to

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escape recognition by myself, but not to be seen in the company of Jenny Hawkins. Accordingly it is this woman who holds the key to the secret of which we have a presentiment." These reflections of his were broken in upon by the guests.

"Well, has the news of Sorège's marriage thrown you into a gloomy mood? You have not a word to say."

"My dear Christian, no one wished to pain you."

"You like Sorège so well as that?"

"All the same, he is not a very sympathetic character."

"He's very handsome."

"Of a cold kind of beauty."

Tragomer continued:

"Do you know if he had any mistresses?"

"Oh, he was not one to choose from our set," said Laurence; "his liaisons were discreet and economical. He always gave me the impression of being terribly mean."

"What! Do you think those in society are not as expensive as the demi-monde?" exclaimed Mariette. "Ask Maugiron how much it cost him at Doucet's and Worth's when honored with the favors of the beautiful Madame de——"

"No names, please," interrupted Maugiron.

"Ah! As tho all Paris did not know the whole matter. It was useless to conceal things, my poor friend; you deceived no one—the husband still less than any other."

"Well, no more on the subject, at all events."

They arose from the table. The two couples

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passed into the salon, where, as three o'clock was striking, Tragomer took leave of the rest, intending to return home and wait for Marenval. They had appointed a rendezvous to compare notes. Each one was to return from his hunt after news and inform his companion of the result. Tragomer was just finishing dressing before going to dine at the club when Marenval, on his way from the abode of Madame de Fréneuse, reached the Rue Rembrandt. The millionaire looked very serious and preoccupied.

"Well," said Christian, "you are punctual to the minute. Has your determination not wavered since yesterday? Are you still resolved to continue in this matter?"

"More than ever. What I have seen and heard at Madame de Fréneuse's will certainly not discourage me. These two women, my friend, are wonderfully patient and courageous. They have no doubt whatever on the subject. Ah! my intervention caused them keen joy. They have not been spoiled, poor creatures, tho they have been cruelly abandoned by everybody."

Tragomer waved his hand in protest.

"Oh! I do not speak for you, my friend," said Marenval kindly, "but for myself. I know you have been put aside, so to speak, by Mademoiselle de Fréneuse. But I had not been dismissed. I had gone from them of my own accord, and it was anything but gallant to act in that way. A cavalier would have acted otherwise, but I was not one. I was a millionaire, just escaped from business mat-



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ters, and timid regarding near relations. I have repented of my conduct, and wish to atone for it. . . . Thanks to your help, I shall succeed, and then we shall see if any one will dare to blame me."

Christian had listened to Marenval with evident impatience. One question was burning his lips.

"Did Mademoiselle de Fréneuse speak of me?"

"Yes."

"In what terms?"

"Listen to me, Tragomer, we are not here to stand on ceremony with each other, but to speak the truth openly. Well, Marie is severe against you. 'He has abandoned us, my mother and myself. I have effaced him from my memory, and he has effaced me from his heart.' Those are the very words she uttered in response to the assurances of devotion and affection I gave her on your behalf."

Christian sadly bowed down his head.

"Perhaps she is not altogether wrong to treat me so harshly," he said, "but she lacks mercy. In the paroxysm of her grief, she shut herself up in her room, refusing to see even those who wished to remain faithful. In this way she made it easy to abandon her. From her point of view, I ought never to have been so weak, I should have summoned up energy from her desire to resist evil fortune. We should have encouraged each other. But her wild passion of grief caused her from the very first to irrevocably condemn those who did not loudly proclaim in favor of her brother. I humbly confess that I did not possess that fine disdain of

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public opinion, still, if she were willing to reflect, she would understand what extenuating circumstances there are."

"Her mother takes up your cause, she excuses you. . . . This poor lady—herself, frightful to relate—confesses that, tho convinced of her son's innocence, she finds herself unable to maintain it. How can one help, therefore, pardoning strangers for a slight hesitation? Especially when they offer themselves to try and atone for their fault."

Christian sadly shook his head, and, changing the conversation, said:

"So they are as firm as ever in their convictions?"

"Yes, only they know nothing about our man, or so little that it is not worth while speaking of it. Moral impressions, nothing more; I might as well say that I have come away as I went."

"For my part, I have received precise information. I have learned that Sorège is betrothed to Miss Maud Harvey, and that he has been in America."

"Ah! that is where he disappeared for six months. What mysteries he makes about trifles! So he is to marry the little Harvey? A fine fortune! The father is worth forty million dollars at the lowest estimate. But there are at least six children, and the sons are always favored in America. No matter, it is an immense fortune. But how do you reconcile these matrimonial projects of Sorège with his relations toward Jenny Hawkins?"

"I do not reconcile them; I simply state facts, and study them. A liaison with Jenny Hawkins does

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not exclude a project of marriage with Miss Harvey, quite the contrary. If the mistress wants money she ought to encourage Sorège to marry a rich heiress. If the marriage is one way of masking whatever peril there may be in the existing relations between Sorège and the prima-donna, it is admissible that Jenny Hawkins, especially if she intends to keep her lover, will support them. Finally, if Sorège has formed the plan of expatriating himself and going to live in New York, for instance, to shelter himself from all possible investigations, then the marriage is fully explained."

"That is true," said Marenval. "If only we could find out exactly who Jenny Hawkins is. Sorège is the only man capable of enlightening us, and he will take good care not to do so. Or else——"

"Or else, Jacques de Fréneuse."

Marenval gave a slight whistle, as was his wont whenever he wished to express his doubts:

"Yes, but then he is far away."

"Nonsense!" said Tragomer. "Three weeks in a good seaworthy vessel would bring us within reach of him."

Marenval started:

"What! Were you thinking of going to New Caledonia?"

The Breton looked calmly at Cyprien:

"Why not? If necessary."

The millionaire glanced with terrified gaze at his ally. He thought: "Good heavens! What kind of an enterprise is this I am now embarked on? This Tragomer is a terrible fellow who will yield to noth

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ing. He talks of going to Nouméa as he would of taking the train for Marseilles.

"He sojourns to the Antipodes with an unheard-of assurance. No sooner is he back than off he goes again. But I, Marenval, retired from business, bent on enjoying life, should I not be a madman to think of such a thing?"

Christian left him no time to draw conclusions:

"It would be a unique opportunity for you, my dear friend, to appear under a decidedly sporting attitude by skilfully masking by means of this pleasure trip the really serious causes of our crusade. Just consider, Marenval, how easily the Vanderbilts cross from America to France, and is not Gordon Bennett with the *Namouna* oftener at Nice than at Newport? I will not drive you to the purchase of an island at the mouth of the Saint Lawrence like your competitor, who makes such good use of his money. All you would have to do would be to give out, in careless fashion, that you are shortly to set out with me for an expedition to Alaska, for instance. You would soon see the effect! The journals would obtain possession of the news which would be skilfully puffed, and you would be quite a hero, for a week at any rate. Henceforth you would be included in the list of those sportsmen for whom distance does not exist, who command the sea, and who are, after all, the real princes under our bourgeois system. Is the prospect not a pleasing one? Have you not, strong and vigorous as you are, enough courage to undertake such a trip?"

Marenval, slightly startled, had passed through

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several contradictory emotions as Tragomer was developing the plan. At first he had felt unhinged at the idea of a prolonged sojourn on a ship. The uncertainty of the winds, the tossing of the waves, inspired in him a prudent fright. He shuddered at the thought that he would have to sleep at night-time in a narrow cabin, against the walls of which the waves would be continually dashing, threatening to stave in the timbers. What sleep would yield to such emotions as these? But then he had had his vanity flattered by seeing himself placed in the rank of the great modern rulers who conquer material difficulties by the power of gold. After all, would he not try to do what others did? Was it so very adventurous to follow their example? Was not his fear of the same kind as that of the simple-minded tradespeople who used to make their wills before undertaking a railway journey? Progress had simplified and facilitated everything, made everything pleasant. Sea voyages were pleasure parties reserved for millionaires alone. Those just mentioned by Tragomer among these hosts of the sea were well known for their taste for luxury and comfort. They did not suffer during their frequent voyages; they certainly did not spend so much money to procure themselves anything disagreeable or painful.

In short, there was no denying that their names were in every one's mouth, and the king of sports, the most costly, rare, and brilliant, was yachting. Then why should not he, Marenval, take rank among the ten or a dozen sovereign masters of the ocean? Had he not the means in abundance? It was not

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sufficiently well known how rich he was. This time however, there could be no doubt left that his fortune was equal to that of the greatest, if he were seen to fling money about with lavish hands in this way.

A return of fear, however, came to his mind. He had never traveled on sea farther than from Havre to Trouville, and from Calais to Dover. He had even then had time to be very sea-sick. Still, in his present feverish condition, he had no recollection of this inconvenience. Then there was the acquisition of a vessel, its organization, the choice of captain and crew. What insurmountable difficulties for him! He mused vaguely, "It is too difficult; it will be impossible of realization," and a delicious feeling of relief returned. He looked at Tragomer with an attempt at a laugh.

"My dear friend," said he, "you do not know what obstacles are in the way of your project. A vessel is necessary for voyaging, and vessels take a considerable time to build."

"Pooh!" said the Breton. "One may hire as many as one wishes. The Solent ports are full of excellent yachts at the disposal of any one. If you will take up this matter seriously, in a fortnight's time you will find a steam-yacht in fine condition, a good sailer, with a well-chosen crew and a reliable captain. It is an English industry. Yachts are hired on the other side of the Channel like country residences. There is plenty of choice."

"Ah!" said Marenval, quivering. "Is it so simple as that?"

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"Everything is simple if one has money. In the material order of things there are scarcely any limits. It is only in the moral order that we are obliged to halt. There are still consciences not to be bought, loyalty beyond price, and virtue not to be bribed by any gold. This, be it said, to the honor of humanity. For the rest, jingle your money in a certain manner, and you may have what you like. But we must not be in so great a hurry, my dear friend; we have still a great deal to do here, even admitting we have no need to undertake the voyage. For the present, we must push forward all preliminary investigations. I intend to see Sorège and speak to him."

"What? Are you going to unmask our batteries?"

"Believe me, they are unmasked; so what I intend to find out is how our man proposes to defend himself. Oh! I will proceed carefully, you may be sure. But it is absolutely necessary that I see what game he intends to play."

"And what shall I do?"

"You might try to find out something concerning Jenny Hawkins—what is her origin, and what she is doing. Perhaps it would be useful to consult a magistrate of high standing on the possibility of a legal error. Do you know the Attorney-General?"

"No, but a nephew of mine, Pierre de Vesin, is a lawyer. He has a fair reputation, and is capable of giving us good counsel. I knew him as a boy, when he was very fond of me. Shall I go and see him?"

"Certainly."

After a moment's hesitation Marenval asked:

"Then you are content with me?"

## A BATTLE OF WITS

"You simply astonish me. I should not have believed you capable of such endurance. I have been saying to myself, Marenval has taken fire at once, because he has a generous nature. Because an unfortunate man is suffering unjustly, he sets out on a campaign for the restoration of rights, but the fever will soon be spent. At the initial difficulties he will rebel and leave me to continue my task all alone. For I am determined to continue in any case. I am stubborn, and can not endure that an enterprise commenced should remain unfinished, unless it is proved to be impossible to pursue. But you have not drawn back; you accept whatever may happen with a calm air of resolution."

Marenval bowed his head:

"Do not esteem me so highly. I must confess that, at bottom, I have hesitated very much. I am not rash or foolhardy by nature; it is only by dint of will-power that I shall bring myself to the level of the position I am about to occupy. If there are risks to be run do not be astonished if you see me tremble somewhat. It will simply be nature manifesting itself. Still, I hope to succeed in curbing my timidity by the force of reasoning. As you have just said, an unfortunate man is suffering unjustly, and if I did not do everything in my power to save him I should never be able to enjoy a single hour's peace of mind all my life long. I am very glad I have told you of my weakness. If necessary you will help me to overcome it, and, with the help of God, we will not rest till we have succeeded in our mission."

Tragomer made no reply; he was greatly moved.



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He said to himself: "Here is one of the most courageous men I know. He knows he is afraid and yet he continues all the same." He did not wish to tell Marenval what he thought of him; he was afraid of terrifying him if he gave him to understand how worthy of esteem he held him. Holding out his hand he said:

"Well, my dear friend, we must separate now until this evening, when I shall see you at the club if you have nothing special to do. We will then arrange matters for to-morrow."

"Very good. But I see you are dressed. Shall I drive you anywhere in particular?"

"Many thanks. I am going to the Madeleine."

They started, well pleased with each other; Marenval, because he felt his self-esteem increase; Tragomer, because he had conceived the hope of finally being restored to Mademoiselle de Fréneuse's good graces.

Sorège was at the club when Tragomer entered the salon about seven o'clock. Leaning against the mantelpiece the count was chatting to a group of friends, his physiognomy cold and close, so perfectly masking his impressions. He spoke, with eyes half-closed, nothing to indicate his inmost thoughts. His face was that of a diplomat, the lines cunning, such as might also indicate the features of a traitor. Tragomer did not approach the group, neither did Sorège make any movement in his direction. These two men had known each other for twenty years; they had lived near each other in complete intimacy. One might have said they were two enemies.

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Tragomer took up an illustrated journal from the table, but had scarcely turned over a page when Maugiron tapped him on the shoulder:

"Are you going to dine?"

"Yes, with you, if you like?"

"Certainly. I am dining with Frécourt."

"Good. I should like to ask him a few questions."

Frécourt, familiarly named "the key of the cellar," is one of the most up-to-date amateur musicians in Paris. He is acquainted with all the scores, schools, and singers; he could indicate the origin of the most obscure street-ballad. In a club he is indispensable; one has only to show him a couplet or read him a rondeau to know at what pitch it must be sung.

"That, my friend, is just the thing for the air of Calpigi. . . . Or you must adapt that to the air of La pipe et les bottes."

His fund of knowledge was inexhaustible, whence his surname, "the key of the cellar." Acquainted with all the singers, both male and female, for thirty-five years, he spoke with pathos of Patti's débuts, and related the beginning of Yvette Guilbert's career at the Divan Japonais. His electricism was absolute, and he expatiated with as much enthusiasm on Paulus as on de Reszké. His theory was that there was evidently a hierarchy of classes, but each of them was remarkable to an equal degree.

He himself sang in a falsetto voice, which grated on the ears of the most complaisant of his listeners, and it was considered quite a treat, in fashionable

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life, to have him sing a popular air. He would take his revenge by playing Glück, Spontini, or Stradella, then he would finish with the "Regiment de Sambret-Meuse."

The steward passed into the salon, saying: "Dinner is served, gentlemen."

Whereupon every one proceeded to the dining-rooms. Usually there was an average of from forty to fifty guests. A large table, capable of seating twenty-five, was in the center, while smaller ones were in the corners and in other rooms. Several retired generals dined here, bachelors, who, perchance, had not been invited to dine in town, and occasional visitors like Tragomer.

"Frécourt, will you be good enough to speak on any mortal subject except your cursed music?"

It was Maugiron, who from the very commencement, threw out to his companion this severe ultimatum.

"Oh, yes," said Frécourt. "We know you are no melomaniac. Shall I speak to you of cooking, strategy, painting, or politics?"

"Ne parle pas. . . ."

"Rose, je t'en supplie. . . . Sylvain's song from the "Dragons de Villars," Act II., Scene . . .," said Frécourt with a laugh.

"There! Off he goes!"

"Leave Frécourt alone," intervened Tragomer, "For my part I find his musicology very digestive. In Texas, the Indian chiefs have melodies sung to them during their meals."

"You hear, Frécourt; savages!"

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"Oh! ever since civilization has existed, music has been the necessary accompaniment of feasts."

"Are you going to call in the Tziganes?"

"Look at Leonardo da Vinci's canvas representing the Marriage at Cana. There you see musicians scraping the violin, in sumptuous costumes, while the guests empty the large earthenware jars, the water in which has been turned into wine. They are the Tziganes of the period."

"Did they run away with princesses in those days?"\*

"Very probably. Alain Chartier was kissed on the lips by a queen, and he was only a poet."

"Just think what might have happened, had he been a musician."

"Yes," said Tragomer. "But the bacchanals killed Orpheus."

"They were filled with wine. Besides, who knows? Perhaps he would not give them a little tune."

"A dainty little tune—a saucy little tune!" hummed Maugiron.

"Ah! Maugiron, now I have you," said Frécourt, "you're singing yourself."

"Penalty, send for some champagne."

"These musicians, what heretics they are! Champagne? Why not lemonade? You shall taste some Château-Laffite, such as will not be found anywhere

\* Allusion to the elopement of the Princess of Caraman-Chimay—formerly Clara Ward, an immensely wealthy American heiress—with the Tzigane Rigo, a few years ago, and to the scandal caused thereby.

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else. I obtained it specially for the club. I may as well tell you, the commissary of wines is no judge."

As the dinner continued, the conversation gradually became more heated. It was the beneficent hour in which contented stomachs create a state of happiness throughout the whole system. Maugiron was in a benevolent mood, and no longer teased Frécourt. Sorège himself, seated at the large table, away from the three friends, had a less enigmatical smile on his face. The entremets were brought in, when Tragomer, after a momentary silence, turned toward Frécourt and asked carelessly:

"As you know all the singers in the universe, who is Jenny Hawkins?"

"Ah! Jenny Hawkins," said the melomaniac, "the prima-donna who tours abroad with Rovelli? She is Jeanne Baud."

At this declaration Tragomer started.

"Jeanne Baud? That is a French name."

"Certainly. Jeanne Baud sang in operatta at the Variétés when the 'Pericole' was repeated. She took no important part at that time, playing the rôle of chambermaid to the Princess of Mantua. She was pretty, of good figure, and with a promising voice; but she did not work hard, Jeanne was too fond of gaiety to find time for practising her scales. Still, I predicted a brilliant future for her."

"Did she sing under her own name?" interrupted Tragomer.

"She called herself Jane Baudier. Oh! you could not have known her, Tragomer, you were never an

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habitué of the theaters. Besides, she was totally ignored except for beauty."

"How old is she?"

"About thirty."

"What was she like, in point of physique?"

"Ah! a beautiful brunette, with regular features, magnificent dark eyes, a rather large mouth, but with teeth like pearls. One fine morning, she disappeared, and has since then only been heard of under the name of Jenny Hawkins, which, as you may imagine, is infinitely more taking for the Anglo-Saxons than Jeanne Baud or Jane Baudier. For one thing, they look upon her as their compatriot, which is certainly rather flattering."

"How long has she been away from France?"

"About three years. But if the matter interests you, I know some one who can give you precise information."

"Who is he?"

"Campistron, the dramatic correspondent. As he recruits all touring troupes, he is well acquainted with the individual members. Even those with whom he has no direct business."

"Where does this correspondent live?"

"Campistron? No. 17 rue de Lancry. Everybody knows Campistron."

"Yes, you know him," said Maugiron rather ill-temperedly, "because you are music mad; but how can you expect Tragomer to know him?"

"By simply having seen him at the club. He has been here often when some piece or other has had to be organized or a soirée arranged. Campistron deals

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with everything, from a grand first rôle to the carbine-shooter breaking eggs on his child's head like William Tell, performing-dogs, and chain-breaking. He is an astonishing type of humanity in every way."

"Will you not stop boring us with this old fool?" interrupted Maugiron furiously. "Tragomer is tired of it all."

"Not at all; on the contrary, I am greatly interested," said Christian gently. "You, Maugiron, when one stops talking of wine, are out of your element. Listen to what we are saying, while you finish your Laffitte. So you were acquainted with this Jeanne Baud, Frécourt?"

"Yes, my friend, I knew her at the Conservatoire in Achard's class. She possessed a charming mezzo-soprano voice. The life she led, however, was a very reckless one—nothing is worse for the vocal chords. She would drive up to the Faubourg Poissonnière, in a brougham to which was harnessed a horse that had cost \$750. You ought to have seen the look on the face of old Ambrose Thomas. 'Decadence and corruption, sir,' he would say, with up-raised arms. The light-hearted girl singer missed her prize, obtaining only an honorable mention. There was almost a riot in the hall on account of the toilet she wore, and her pearl earrings. Salvaneuse protected her at that period. He thrashed, publicly, on the open boulevard, Armand Valentin, who had written a ferocious article on her. Afterward, for five or six years, she left the musical career; then one fine morning she appeared at the Variétés in a

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revue with the finest figure that had been seen there for some time."

"Is it true, Tragomer, that all this interests you?"

"Certainly, I am smoking and resting at the same time. I am all right."

"For my part, I regard him as antediluvian, with his Jeanne Baud and her Salvaneuse, whom I can still picture in his tightly laced corset, with dyed whiskers, and wearing an eyeglass. These are nothing but old women's tales he is giving us. He will be relating to us in a minute all about Valentine and Markowski."

Tragomer burst out laughing:

"Come, you young blasé, a little indulgence for our old young-hearted friends. Continue, Frécourt, I am listening with great interest."

"Ah, my dear friend, if incidents of this period amuse you, I know several others which are very astonishing."

"No," protested the Breton uneasily, "continue about Jeanne Baud; since we have begun we must finish."

"Whatever interest can you take in this Jeanne Baud?" growled Maugiron. "I never knew you to be so stupid before."

"You do not understand, Maugiron," said Tragomer gravely. "Some day, I will explain all, and the account will astonish you."

"Well, then, continue Frécourt, as it seems you are making yourself so interesting."



## Chapter VIII

### "WHEN GREEK MEETS GREEK"

AND Maugiron, lighting a cigar, began to smoke, in an evidently bad temper. Coffee was being served, and a few of the diners had already left the rooms. Intimacy became greater, and Frécourt risked one elbow on the table-cloth, continuing:

"If our young lady had only curbed herself, she was in the way of making a large fortune. She had a handsome house in the Rue de la Faisanderie, the service of which became quite select. It is from this time that her liaison with Woréseff dates, and also her passion for Sabine Leduc."

"Ha! The whole string! What horror I feel for women of that kind!"

"You are not the only one. Probably Woréseff was of your opinion, for he abruptly abandoned her, leaving her to live for a whole year on the wrecks of her luxury; then, closely pressed by her creditors, doubtless she vanished, appearing abroad under the name of Jenny Hawkins. Her house was sold after her departure, and since then nothing more has been heard of her except through the journals. She has never returned to Paris, as tho she entertained a grudge against the scene of her discomfiture."

They had risen from the table while Frécourt was finishing his tale and were making their way toward

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the salons. Half of the diners had already left. Sorège, seated in an arm-chair, seemed to be digesting his dinner with perfect satisfaction. Tragomer, leaving his companions, drew near the young man, and touched his shoulder from above the high-backed chair:

"Good evening, Jean, quite well?"

Sorège opened his eyes and shot a rapid glance at Tragomer; then the drooping eyelids once more veiled the mysteries of his thoughts. A vague smile passed over his thin lips as he said quietly:

"Hello, Tragomer! is it you? Why did you not dine at the large table with us?"

"Maugiron had reserved me a place at his table. I have heard some important news about yourself. It appears you are about to marry?"

A slight quiver might have been noticed playing about the corner of his mouth, tho Sorège continued smiling, and said:

"Ah! Then some one has told you of this project? . . ."

"Project! Then it is not settled?"

"Does one ever know for certain?"

"It is an American you have chosen. . . .?"

"Yes; a charming lady, Miss Harvey. . . . Do you know her?"

"I have not that honor. But I hope you will be kind enough to introduce me to her."

"With pleasure, tho you are a dangerous companion, Christian, with that vigorous frame of yours. . . . These Americans worship physical strength. . . ."

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Tragomer was watching Sorège with all his faculties awake and highly strung nerves. He listened to the intonations of his voice, and watched the working of his facial expression. Nothing betrayed the Count's agitation except the slight trembling of the mouth, which might be due to the nerves. Then, closely looking at the man he suspected, Tragomer said, with special emphasis and even a menacing tone in his words:

"Was it during your trip to America that you became acquainted with Miss Harvey?"

Sorège did not raise his eyes; he remained close and impassive, then slowly pulled himself together, took out a cigarette, and walking to the mantelpiece lit it, as tho he wished to give himself time to reflect; then he said:

"No; I knew her previously. It was her father who took me to America."

Tragomer was put out of countenance; he had hoped that Sorège, if suddenly attacked, would be afraid, lose his head, and deny the voyage; or at least appear troubled by the question so unexpectedly asked. But his opponent did not lose his head so easily, and was never afraid. Christian immediately had a proof of this. Sorège opened his eyes wide, filled with a disquieting light, and burst into a loud laugh:

"And you. Were you displeased with your displacement? You did not appear to be enjoying yourself very much at San Francisco while listening to Othello in that beautiful box you were occupying."

It was Tragomer's turn to be surprised. He did

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not expect this audacious reply. Not only did Sorège not dissimulate; he even anticipated explanations.

"Then you saw me?" asked the Breton in a tone of eager curiosity.

"Saw you! How could I help it?" said the Count gaily. "You blockade me in an actress's room at the very time it was most essential for me to preserve my incognito."

"In what way?"

Sorège sat down astride an easy chair so as to have the heat and the light of the fire at his back, then, as Tragomer had sunk down, stupefied, into an arm-chair by his side, he continued with admirable tranquillity:

"Just think; I was at San Francisco with Mr. Harvey and his sons when chance threw into my path a former acquaintance whom I had not seen for three or four years, while she had been traveling about the world seeking a fortune. . . ."

"Jenny Hawkins?"

"Yes, Jenny Hawkins. I am not going to play the hypocrite with you. Miss Harvey's father dragged me for two months about his ranchos. It was rather monotonous, and Jenny gave me a very good reception. After all that Americanism it was pleasant to have a little of the European element introduced. . . ."

"Then you were present, occupying a box, when I entered?"

"With your two Yankees, yes. You may imagine whether or not I was anxious to show myself. Had

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you come and flung yourself into my arms you would have had to introduce me to your two friends. They would have spoken of our meeting in the town. Harvey and his sons might have learned that I have had a liaison there, and knowing as I do the opinions of the Anglo-Saxons, I should have found myself in a difficult situation. You are not angry with me, are you?"

Tragomer had recovered his self-possession. He was now reflecting. Sorège's explanation was certainly acceptable, even probable. But, for a mind as prepossessed as Christian's, there was an excess of skill in the whole story; it rested on too well laid a foundation. In this minute and careful arrangement was revealed the intention to deceive. He wished to drive to extremities this admirable actor, to force him to exhibit all his talent.

"I am not angry with you in the slightest, since you had an interest in acting as you did. But Jenny Hawkins knew me also, it appears?"

"Knew you?"

"The moment the door was closed you said to her in low tones: 'Take care—Tragomer!'"

Sorège imperceptibly frowned. Perhaps he felt he was being pressed too hard, and was slightly angry in consequence. He dryly replied:

"Ah! you heard? Sly fellow. You have good ears. Well, yes, she knew you. In a very simple manner. I saw you from my corner of the box as soon as you entered. She, too, as an artiste, interested in learning before whom she was singing, had noticed you and guessed you to be a foreigner. As

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soon as I entered her room, she spoke of your host and his companion: 'A Frenchman, I would swear,' she said. 'A Parisian, even,' I replied. 'Then you know him?' 'Certainly, he is a friend of mine.' 'Bring him to me.' 'You must be joking. If Tragomer has taken your fancy, wait till I am gone.' She said it was stupid on my part, and naturally I could not inform her that the reason I did not wish to be seen in her presence was that I was about to be married. I got out of the scrape by pretending to be jealous. That is why, when you entered the room I hastily closed the door, uttering your name by way of warning, and adding in menacing tones, the words 'Take care.'"

Tragomer did not deny the truth of this account. He hastened to throw light on the entire facts.

"It was you who were returning with her after the performance?"

"Naturally. Your sudden appearance in front of the door just when I was about to descend was very annoying. We were returning to take supper together."

"So you left each other there, without meeting again?"

"Oh, no," said Sorège pleasantly. "Ten minutes after, when you had made up your mind to return into the hotel, Jenny came out again. I was waiting for her in the carriage, and, instead of taking supper at the Hotel des Etrangers, we went to the Golden House. It was when leaving there at two o'clock in the morning that she caught a cold and was hoarse the next day, causing her performance

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the following evening to be countermanded, and bringing about her departure for Chicago."

"Where you saw her again?"

"Certainly. We recompensed ourselves fully for all the worry you had caused us. But now, in your turn, will you explain to me why you are so determined to play the spy on this poor girl, as you have been doing?"

"Ah, that's a fine question. I had found her company very charming, and I discovered that some mysterious personage or other was occupying the place I was anxious to hold. I wanted to be quite certain whether I had any chance or not."

Sorège, with closed eyes, and a smile on his lips continued to smoke. Then he said, good humoredly:

"That is all very simple. We were rivals for a whole twenty-four hours. But for my prospective stepfather and those cowboy sons of his, I would willingly have introduced you, and you would have shared my good fortune, as is right between friends, especially when traveling."

Tragomer said nothing for some moments, then, as tho overcome by curiosity, asked:

"Where did you become acquainted with Jenny Hawkins?"

"Ah, that is annoying you, is it? Well, I will tell you. I made her acquaintance in London at the Alhambra, where she was engaged to sing and dance, without giving any signs that she would some day become a star."

"Is she not Italian?" asked Tragomer abruptly.

Sorège slowly opened his eyes, and spoke in a

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voice, the sudden dryness of which alone betrayed his emotion:

"Why Italian? Because she sings in Italian? All singers on tour can sing in Italian. It is indispensable, and may be learned in twenty lessons."

"At any rate, she is neither English nor American, so my hosts told me."

"Then, if you know, why do you ask me?"

"To see if you knew or not."

"I might well not have known, for this girl's past life has little interest for me, but, as it happens, I do know, my good Christian. I like to make inquiries concerning the people with whom I have even passing relations, and I am very well informed concerning Jenny Hawkins——"

"Whose name is not Jenny Hawkins?"

"No," said Sorège coldly. "She is named Jeanne Baud, or Jane Baudier, and is French by birth. Now are you satisfied, Tragomer?"

In the tone in which these words were uttered there was so much sarcasm that Christian clenched his hands together in wrath. It was as tho his interlocutor had said to him: "Hunt everywhere, my poor fellow, you will not find me at fault. I will put you off, as I like, and continue the game as long as I please. Here I have had you on tenter-hooks for a whole hour, telling you a pack of falsehoods, to lead you to the discovery of Jeanne Baud, who is a real personage on whose authenticity you will rack your brains in vain."

At that very moment Tragomer was certain that Jenny Hawkins was not Jeanne Baud, and that in



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this question was the very knot of the puzzle. The difficulty was to discover Léa Pérelli in Jeanne Baud. For the mask under which Sorège covered her was a double one, without the slightest doubt. But the Count had lifted that of Jenny Hawkins and shown Jeanne Baud. There was nothing more to expect. Christian had a capital interest in not straining his relations with Sorège. Assuming a jovial air he replied:

"Good. I see you are still the same; very circumspect in all you do. As times go this is certainly no trifling quality."

"I try to reason a little. There are so many people who march straight in front of themselves in a very harebrained fashion. Heavens! There are sufficient opportunities about for breaking one's neck without wilfully choosing the wrong paths."

"Will you go and live in America when you are married?"

"No, indeed. It is impossible to live all one's life in such a country, as you doubtless know. One might as well live in some provincial manufactory in the midst of the whirl of business and debarred from distractions of any kind. Americans who have made their pile know well enough that their country is habitable only for the purpose of making money, accordingly they are anxious to come and settle in Europe. If one wished to play them a good trick, it would be sufficient to force them to live in the United States. They would die of grief."

"That is why their daughters manifest so lively a propensity to marry English or French noblemen."

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"If you feel so inclined, Harvey is acquainted with several charming young ladies, light-complexioned, with long waists and short legs, rather heavy chins, and possessed of large dowries. We must cross the races, Tragomer."

"Yes! But such an alliance is not in my line just now. Still, I shall compliment your fiancée heartily on the choice she has made."

"Very well, I will take you to see Harvey one of these evenings. The most extraordinary liquors are supplied, such as will astonish you."

"I shall drink none of them."

They were now laughing in perfect freedom and unreservedly, like a pair of boon companions. To see and hear them no one would have suspected the gravity of the conversation just over, and how important were the interests discussed. And yet had any one touched Sorège's neck he would at once have perceived that, altho perfectly calm to all appearance, he was perspiring profusely, as tho he had just finished a long race. The two friends arose, and leaning in familiar fashion on each other, passed into the gambling-room, and drew near the baccarat table:

"Do you ever play now?" asked Tragomer.

"Occasionally, to kill an hour or two."

"Do you win?"

"Sometimes."

Tragomer looked at Sorège and said sorrowfully:

"Then you are not like poor Jacques; he never won."

In spite of Sorège's self-possession, he trembled on

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hearing that name. A pallor spread over his face, and he replied in a scarcely audible voice:

"At the game he played it was impossible to win."

Tragomer then shook his head and said in firm tones:

"Especially when one has to deal with opponents who cheat with corner-bent cards."

For a moment they stood facing each other without uttering a word.

Sorège's eyes sparkled, his lips quivered, as tho on the point of making some imprudent declaration or other. But he succeeded in curbing himself. He moved away a few paces, then returned to his friend and said:

"One is never ruined through others, Tragomer; it is weakness to pretend that this is the case. Every one is master of his own destiny. If poor Jacques were here now he would acknowledge I am right in saying so."

And with a proud wave of the hand he bade Christian good-by, and left the room.

## Chapter IX

### FLASHES OF LIGHT

THE Campistron dramatic agency is situated in the Rue de Lancry, on the third floor, looking on the courtyard. There, retiring from public life, after a busy career in provincial theaters, the former first tenor undertook to supply his ex-directors with artistes for all kinds of employment. Madame Campistron, better known under the name of Gloriette, had had a passing reputation as a music-hall singer. She helped her husband to organize rehearsals, to stage short performances, and to give advice to amateurs. For Campistron not only placed in all the departments the overflow from the Paris theaters, he also undertook to supply heads of families with plays, reviews, comic operas, pantomimes, and, generally speaking, everything that is seen, listened to, hissed, or applauded by the public.

Business prospered with him. He had rented the remaining apartment on the third floor in order to have a miniature stage fixed up there, where he gave lessons and rehearsals, and which he pompously called his Conservatoire. The fact was that Campistron was not merely a dramatic contractor, he was an innovator, he had invented a new method, ventral singing.

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"You do not breathe with the chest," he would say in a voice of thunder—the rather cracked voice he used in singing the "Prophète" of Meyerbeer. "It is always ventral!"

He had already, by his process, changed scores of baritones to basses and tenors to baritones, without speaking of those he had rendered voiceless. But little did he care! Imperturbably he continued his vocal massacre. His position as correspondent was the one by which he lived, tho he despised it. His position as professor brought him nothing but mortification, but he gloried in it. Those sly rogues who desired good engagements knew this weakness of his. They gave out that they sang according to the Campistron method, whereupon they were immediately extolled as real prodigies by the vain old man.

According to Frécourt's directions, Tragomer and Marenval one day called at No. 17 rue de Lancry about four o'clock. The doorkeeper, who was scouring a saucepan on the threshold of her room, on being interrogated by Marenval replied slyly:

"The staircase in front. If for an engagement, third floor, door to the left; if for lessons, door to the right."

As the two men appeared to be undecided, she added:

"Impossible to make a mistake. As soon as you hear yells and shrieks you will have reached the right place."

Tragomer burst into a laugh and said:

"Thank you, Madame."

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The old dame continued scraping her boiler, and Marenval heard her growling: "Here are some more poor actors, with fur-lined coats on their backs, and not a farthing in their pockets!"

"My dear friend," said Marenval, as he climbed the damp and evil-smelling staircase, "I will not conceal from you my impression that this doorkeeper, accustomed to studying faces, has doubtless taken you for a young first tenor and myself probably for your father, a nobleman in quest of a director. She has even expressed her disdain in scarcely correct language."

"We must be proof against all these impressions, Marenval, we shall meet with such often enough."

"I am not complaining, my dear friend, it is merely a fact I am stating. It does not trouble me in the slightest."

Tragomer had halted on the second floor. Violent vociferations were heard on the floor above.

"They are shrieking and yelling, as the old lady said; we are drawing near."

They climbed the third floor, which was as steep as a ladder.

"Oh!" exclaimed Marenval, "this third floor might well count for two. Give me time to recover my breath. Tragomer, you mount like a chamois."

They finally reached a door on which might be read the following inscription, painted in black letters: "Campistron, dramatic correspondent. Singing and elocution lessons. Vocal method." On a small piece of paper, attached to the door by four wafers, was this inscription, hand written: "Ring

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loudly." The recommendation was not without purpose, for a whole tempest of sepulchral cries was being let loose, as tho a very painful surgical operation was being performed on a very sensitive patient.

"Ah! we are in front of the door on the right, the lesson-room," said Tragomer. "We must ring at the one on the left, the engagement-room."

On this door the inscription was "Campistron Agency. Engagements, Information. Performances of every description from ten o'clock till five o'clock. T. T. H."

"T. T. H.," said Marenval. "That means 'Turn the handle.'"

He suited the action to the word. The door opened, and a gloomy-looking room, hung with tarnished wallpaper, and separated in all its length by a wooden balustrade, was presented to their view. Behind the balustrade, two clerks, of very shabby aspect, were writing. Men and women were seated on the well-worn benches, waiting. One of the clerks raised his head, laid down his pen, and after glancing at the two visitors recognized that they were no ordinary clients, and rising from his seat asked:

"Can I do anything for you, gentlemen?"

"We wish to speak to M. Campistron," said Tragomer.

"He is engaged just now, but if you would like to speak to Madame Campistron?"

Marenval and Tragomer exchanged glances.

"Very well," replied Marenval.

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The clerk opened a door in the balustrade, and crossed the ante-chamber. After knocking at a door he entered, with an air of mystery, returning after a few seconds.

"Will you please follow me?" he said.

Murmurings arose from the people waiting there on the benches. They had been waiting there for a long time, probably without great expectations, and looks of protest against the favor thus brutally granted before their very eyes, were exchanged.

"Always the same thing. We shall stay here till closing time, and then we shall be told to return to-morrow. Campistron was not so haughty, down in Perpignan, when singing with me in '*La Favorita*.'"

Marenval and Tragomer heard no further. They had entered a study, furnished with green repp, where a plump little woman of too light complexion was seated in front of a desk, signing an engagement with a very handsome girl, well made up, and smelling strongly of musk. Madame Campistron requested the visitors to take a seat and said:

"I shall be at your service in a minute, gentlemen."

Then, turning to the young girl, she said:

"There you are. You start to-morrow, and make your *début* at the end of the week. You will have a hundred francs the first month, and a hundred and fifty the second."

"I agree, Madame Campistron, and I will send you some sugar sticks so that you may not forget me. What kind of a town is Rouen?"



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"Garrison town, my child; noted for its wealth and artistic taste. The men are rather parsimonious, but generally speaking they may be relied on. As for the public, they are like the cider of that district, sometimes sweet, sometimes sour. That depends on circumstances. A pleasant journey, and be punctual in your payments."

The pretty girl shot a keen glance at Tragomer and a graceful smile at Marenval, then folding up her deed, she slipped it in her bodice. Leaving the atmosphere behind her strongly saturated with perfume, she left the room. Madame Campistron meantime had taken a seat near the two visitors.

"Gentlemen, what can I do to serve you?" she said with an engaging smile.

"Ah, Madame, the proceeding we are engaged on is a delicate one," began Tragomer. "My friend and myself are seeking a singer who is traveling about the world with a lyric company, and the idea was suggested to us to approach M. Campistron, whose knowledge we have been assured is unique in matters of this kind. We wish to know where the circuit in question is at this moment."

"You have not presumed too much on our ability to serve you, sir," she said emphatically, "and I should be very much surprised if we were unable to give you precise information. Here is a catalog of all the companies on tour in Paris and London, the families of the artists often come to ask where letters must be addressed to reach their destination. We do all we can to assist them. What company is it?"

## FLASHES OF LIGHT

"The Rovelli Company."

"Ah, Rovelli?" said Madame Campistron with an air of disdain. "A colorless voice. Such an organ as his does not take in France. It is lacking in tone. And tone is not to be acquired by singing through the nose. If M. Campistron were here, he would explain his method to you. He is the man to give tone to a voice. But, I beg your pardon. What is the name of the person in whom you are interested?"

"Miss Jenny Hawkins."

At this name Madame Campistron's face underwent a sudden change; her cheeks became livid, her painted eyebrows contracted, barring her forehead with a formidable line, while she struck her hands against each other and said bitterly:

"Ah, ah, Jenny Hawkins. It is long since I heard Jenny Hawkins's name mentioned. It is lucky, too, that Monsieur Campistron is not present. A painful emotion is thus spared him."

"In what way, Madame?" asked Marenval.

"M. Campistron has been greatly mortified by the artiste you have just mentioned. . . . However, I beg your pardon, that is of slight importance. Doubtless, gentlemen, one of you is interested in this young lady?"

"In no way, Madame," replied Tragomer, vexed at seeing the confidential information scarcely begun thus cut short. "It is simply a question of inheritance."

"Ah! she is to inherit?" exclaimed Madame Campistron indignantly. "Always those silly girls who

## IN DEEP ABYSS

have the most luck. Oh! I must call Campistron after all. Excuse me a moment, gentlemen."

Seizing an acoustic tube she blew strongly, then shouted through the mouthpiece:

"Monsieur Campistron, you must come here a few minutes; two gentlemen have called who will give you important information. . . ."

Placing the apparatus to her ear she listened, and then replied eagerly:

"Leave the great idiot to your assistant and come. You will lose nothing, and he can practise his scales in the mean time."

A heavy step shook the floor, a sonorous cough was heard in the next room, and Campistron, a dark-complexioned, thickly bearded man, entered. He bowed, smiling, his hand to his breast, like a singer responding to an encore, and said in a modulated tone of voice:

"I am at your service, gentlemen. How can I help you?"

"Ah! Be ready to turn pale, Campistron; these gentlemen are looking for Jenny Hawkins, who has inherited."

Campistron assumed the posture of Hippocrates refusing the gifts of Artaxerxes. Closing his eyes he turned aside his head, extending his arms. One would have thought the succession had been offered to him. Then he said in grave tones:

"I had hoped never to hear again of that wretched woman."

"You see, gentlemen. What did I tell you? Campistron, master yourself. You must answer

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these gentlemen. They wish to know where the Rovelli Company is at this moment."

"Ah! ah! Rovelli," sneered the former tenor disdainfully. "Yes; it was to sing with this Neapolitan merry-andrew that she left me. A girl I would have had in the opera had she only listened to me. But it was of no avail! She would sing from the chest! Madness! Well! well! Gentlemen, in spite of everything, Rovelli and the Italian method, my instruction had its effect, and she actually does sing ventrally!"

Marenval and Tragomer had no time to wonder by what method Campistron spoke. They shuddered, and the very windows shook at the formidable rolling sounds which issued from the mouth of the extenor. But Campistron soon calmed down. His fits of passion were theatrical, lasting only long enough to produce their desired effect. Resuming his smile he said:

"She is not named Jenny Hawkins, but Jeanne Baud. I knew her mother very well. . . ."

Madame Campistron at this grew angry and said in bitter tones:

"Ah! speak of the daughter, not of the mother. I have had worry enough with that woman. She was rather too attentive to you during her lifetime. Ah! gentlemen, all the women. . . . Yes, all, used to be mad over him. . . . Come, speak to these gentlemen. Never mind your private life. . . ."

Campistron opened a register, and striking the folios with the palm of his hand, said:

"Here, gentlemen, is the route taken by all the

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important companies on tour throughout the world. For instance, if you wanted to know where Madame Lassalle is just now? "

Turning several pages he said:

"On the 17th instant she was at Bucharest. . . . On the 21st at Budapest, on the 23d at Vienna. . . ."

"But we want Rovelli," interrupted Madame Campistron.

"Rovelli and his company are actually at Vera Cruz. . . . They are going from there to Mexico and Tampico, then to Guayama, . . . halting at Colombia and returning to Europe in the spring to finish the tour during the season at London."

"Ah!" said Tragomer, "is that correct? Will Jenny Hawkins go to London?"

"In the month of May she will be singing at Covent Garden."

"And about what time exactly, Monsieur Campistron, did she leave France?"

"She left with Rovelli two years ago."

"Two years. You are quite sure?"

"Absolutely certain. In the month of August she was still working with me here. Madame Campistron will tell you the same, our accompanist can affirm my statement, and everybody in the house would testify to it. But what advantage is it to know this?"

"It is impossible to know," said Marenval gravely. "But it would be useful to be certain of this particular."

"Well! gentlemen. I will confirm my statement. As a rule, she paid for her lessons very punctually,

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but she left France without settling her last month's account. I do not reproach her for it," said Campistron loftily, "artistes are not bargainers. They work willingly for honor alone. I merely state the fact. Tho I wrote reproaching her for leaving me without notice, even without saying good-by, she never even replied. It was not an autograph I cared for, gentlemen. I have more than a score of letters from her here."

"Could you show us a specimen?"

Campistron laid his hand on his heart and said proudly:

"First of all, gentlemen, assure me that you do not wish to make a wrong use of this writing against a woman. Jeanne Baud has been passionately loved. She was so beautiful! Will you give me your word of honor that there is no secret affair of jealousy here?"

"I give it you, for my friend and myself."

"Then, sir, I will satisfy you. Look in the folios under letter B, my dear. Here, everything is well arranged, sir, otherwise we should be ruined."

Madame Campistron opened a drawer and began the search. Tragomer, desirous of more complete information, said:

"You mentioned just now, sir, that Jeanne Baud was very beautiful. Have you a portrait of her, by any chance?"

"Yes, her photograph, with an effusive dedication, and her autograph. My dear, give me the photograph with the writing on it?"

"Here it is," said Madame Campistron.

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She handed to her husband a small album, which the singer examined with mingled satisfaction and wrath:

"Yes, here she is, the wretch. One might say, gentlemen, that she has been endowed by heaven with the most precious of gifts, form, gait, expression. Ah! the expression! Judge it yourselves."

He held out the photo to Tragomer, who took it with a feeling of real anxiety. He hesitated before looking at it. A glance was to decide everything. If the photograph represented Jenny Hawkins as he had seen her in San Francisco, then everything was lost. The only thing would be to admit an incredible resemblance between her and Léa Pérelli. But if it were not the singer? Raising the portrait to his eyes, he exclaimed:

"This is not Jenny Hawkins!"

"Come, sir," said Campistron, with a condescending smile, "you are joking. It is Jeanne Baud, and as Jeanne Baud is Jenny Hawkins, there can be no mistake."

Tragomer made no reply. He looked at the portrait, which represented a beautiful and dark-complexioned girl, tall, décolleté, with an admirable figure, and smiling as tho in a reverie. Not a single feature of the woman in the San Francisco theater. Accordingly, there must, without the faintest doubt, be a mistake as to the individual. If Jenny Hawkins were Jeanne Baud, there had been a substitution of state or condition, and Léa Pérelli had for two years been living under an assumed name. But then, who was the murdered person?

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Here Tragomer bristled against indestructible realities. The woman who had been assassinated in the Rue Marbeuf was Léa Pérelli. Everybody had recognized her. Jacques de Fréneuse himself had not disputed her identity. In spite of the disfigured face, unrecognizable by reason of revolver shots and the madness of the assassin, her tall figure and magnificent blonde hair, the clothes she wore, the very rings found on her fingers—everything, in short, testified that the murdered woman was indeed Jacques's mistress. And yet it was not this person, since now, Tragomer, after suspecting that she was alive, was certain that she was living under an assumed name.

Again he looked at the photograph. Jeanne Baud was as dark-complexioned as Léa Pérelli was fair. The figure was the same; there were the same pearly teeth and charming lips. Tragomer summoned back to memory all he still recognized of Léa Pérelli in that bruised face and mouth, the white teeth of which gave forth a ghastly smile, and there Jeanne Baud had the same mouth as Léa Pérelli. He said:

"Will you trust this photograph to me, sir? It would be of great service, and I will undertake to return it within two days. So that you may know with whom you are dealing, there is my card."

Campistron glanced at the card held out to him and bowed in deferential fashion.

"Very pleased to be of service to Viscount Tragomer. Doubtless, you wish to show the portrait to the notary?"



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"You have guessed, Monsieur Campistron. Some friends of mine are engaged in this liquidation, which threatens to be one difficult of settlement. The identity of the inheritors must be established; hence the utility of the portrait and the writing."

"I understand."

"Was this Miss Hawkins agreeable in disposition?"

"Agreeable, sir!" exclaimed Madame Campistron. "Nothing of the kind. She was violence itself! Thunder and lightning! Altogether unscrupulous!"

"My dear!" interrupted the ex-tenor.

"Oh! she was well known. And what language! Billingsgate, sir, was out of the question. Ah! It was certain she had never been brought up by a duchess. Old Mother Baud— Yes, Campistron, in spite of all your protests, she was a mere nobody. And her daughter was the same. One day I saw her strike Bonnaud, the tenor, because he would not sing a little quicker in the duet from 'Carmen.' He turned dumb with astonishment right in the middle of a couplet. No one has ever been able to live with her, so wicked and vicious was she. As you may understand, sir, one does not care to live with a woman who associates with both men and women, and that at the same time!"

"Now you are satisfied!" burst forth Campistron. "You have vented all your spleen on this poor girl, I suppose. No, sir, she was not by any means a paragon of virtue, but she had a splendid voice before Rovelli——"

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Tragomer, "but

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did Rovelli know her before meeting her in England?"

"He had never seen her."

"Had she sung in England under the name of Baud before leaving for America under that of Jenny Hawkins?"

"Yes, sir, she had an engagement for the Alhambra. In reality, it was not good enough for her. All the same, she did not arrange matters with the management, and, accordingly, a lawsuit was instituted, at which Jenny Hawkins was condemned to pay an indemnity."

"Has she sung in England during the past two years?"

"No, sir, she will make her *début* there for the first time next spring."

"And no one will remember Jeanne Baud when transformed into Jenny Hawkins."

"You are right, sir. People forget so quickly. The more so, as no one saw her, because she cancelled the engagement before appearing in public. She was in no way remarkable before taking up her Italian career."

"Are there any artistes who were friendly with Jeanne Baud, formerly at the Conservatoire, for instance, or here, by whom she might run the risk of being recognized?"

"Yes, there are some in Paris; but the chances in London against such an event are great."

"Thank you, sir, I have all the information I wished to secure," said Tragomer, "I must thank you heartily for all your assistance."

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“Do not mention it, Monsieur le Vicomte; gentlemen are certain of a very favorable reception here. If we can be of any service to you, we will endeavor to give full satisfaction. Drawing-room entertainments, pantomimes, whatever is of a diverting or interesting nature. Will you permit me to offer you a prospectus?”

## Chapter X

### STEP BY STEP AGAINST ERROR

IN possession of the photograph, and their hands full of papers, Marenval and Tragomer took leave of the Campistrans. From the landing they heard the bass singer, whose lessons had been curtailed by their conversation with Campistron, growling out his scales. They descended the damp, evil-smelling staircase, right past the doorkeeper, who was now peeling onions, and, with disdainful look, followed them right to the outer door.

"Well! Tragomer," said Marenval, once in the street, "will you kindly explain the meaning of the conversation you have just been engaged in with that great painted woman and that ridiculous husband of hers? On my word of honor, I am quite at sea in the matter."

"We must congratulate ourselves, Marenval," said Christian. "Our inquiry has taken an immense stride forward. I have actually the proof in my possession that Jenny Hawkins is not the woman she is believed to be. We must now speak to a magistrate, for we are entering on the most complicated phase of the whole affair."

"What will this be?" exclaimed Marenval.

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"It will be impassioned, Marenval. We shall have to struggle, step by step, against error, for the triumph of truth. Yesterday, we ran the risk of failure. To-day we have before us a real end in view. The whole question consisted in our being convinced that Jeanne Baud was not Jenny Hawkins. The proof of this is in my pocket. This photograph, signed by Campistron's pupil, proves conclusively that there has been a substitution of persons. Jenny Hawkins will now have to explain how it is that she has no longer the features of Jeanne Baud, but those of a person alleged to have been killed, two years ago, at the very moment that Jeanne Baud quitted England, changed her name, concealed herself from such as might have known her, and created for herself an entirely new personality. Now do you understand, Marenval?"

"I am beginning to do so. Still, my dear friend, are we going to set off in pursuit of Miss Jenny Hawkins? If she is touring up and down the world the enterprise might lead us a considerable distance."

"Do not alarm yourself. We can not start yet. That will be for later, perhaps. Jenny Hawkins is to come to London—she can not escape us. It is not possible to cry off an engagement in a London theater without paying a considerable forfeit. She will come, you will see. Once there, we shall be free to act. The London season does not startle you, I suppose?"

"On the contrary. It would be a pleasure to me to cross the Channel."

They had reached the Boulevard Magenta, where

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they had taken the precaution to leave the carriage which had brought them. Tragomer said to Marenval:

"Now we must go to the magistracy. You have mentioned calling on Pierre de Vesin. I am quite ready to meet him. . . . I have known him for twenty years. He does not inspire me with fear, either in a civil or legal capacity."

"When would you like to see him?"

"The sooner the better."

Marenval took out his watch.

"At five o'clock he will have left the Law Courts. Shall we call on him now?"

"Very good idea."

"Rue de Matignon," said Marenval to the cabman.

When Tragomer said to his companion that he was not afraid of Pierre de Vesin in either his civil or legal capacity, he knew of whom he was speaking. He was a type of the modern magistrate, this attorney of forty years of age, handsome, witty, very eloquent and skilled in legal questions, but entirely forgetting his serious functions and duties when in society, and caring only to enjoy life among witty men and charming women. A bachelor, rich, passionately fond of the beautiful, associated with all the remarkable painters and celebrated *littérateurs* in Paris, Pierre de Vesin's splendid rooms formed a brilliant center on Sundays, when talented artistes of every description met one another in perfect intimacy.

The dinners in the Rue de Matignon were well known. Only men were invited there. A few soci-

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ety women, attracted by the tales they heard, made desperate attempts to obtain admission. All in vain; orders were always rigidly adhered to, and the epicureans who dined with this enlightened host never had their peace of mind disturbed by the company of women.

Pierre de Vesin, who had left the law courts an hour ago, was seated by the fireside, quietly reading, when his servant announced Tragomer and Marenval. The magistrate laid down his book, passed into the salon, and, with hand outstretched toward his visitors, said: "Welcome, my dear viscount, and you, my cousin; what favorable wind has blown you this way?"

"We wish to speak to you in your capacity as a magistrate," said Marenval gravely.

"You do not expect me to change my costume, like Master Jacques, I suppose," said the lawyer with a smile. "Come into my study, we shall be more comfortable there."

Conducting them into the room he had just left, he pointed to a couple of arm-chairs, and said:

"Take a seat. Have you committed some crime or other? Do I see a pair of culprits before me?"

"No. Let your conscience be at peace," replied Tragomer. "We have not come here on our behalf. It concerns an unhappy man in whose fate we are interested."

The magistrate looked at them gravely. His intelligent face, with black beard in which a few silver streaks already showed themselves, and reflective eyes, were instantly all attention. He said:

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"Well! I am listening."

"In the first place, my dear friend, do you remember the principal features in the trial of Jacques de Fréneuse?"

"I remember more than the principal features, I can recall all the details," said Vesin. "My colleague, Frémart, who was on duty at the Assizes, and should have filled the part of public prosecutor, was unwell. He was suffering from gout. Accordingly I was instructed to study the cases to be tried during that fortnight, so that I might be ready to take Frémart's place in case he found it impossible to attend the court in the middle of the session. In this way I examined the Fréneuse brief. I studied it with the greater interest as I, like the rest of you, had met this young man in society and entertained considerable sympathy for his family. I did not know him intimately enough to withdraw, but sufficiently well to make an ardent attempt to throw some light on this extraordinary event. I had no opportunity to speak, for which I was very thankful. It would have been very painful for me to speak against this young man, and I should have done so without pity, for I had quite convinced myself of his guilt."

"Ah!" said Tragomer. "You had found the proof of Fréneuse's guilt in the brief?"

"Overwhelming proof, my dear friend. More complete proof would not be possible, were it not the confession of his crime by the culprit himself."

"Then you have no doubt that he was justly sentenced?"



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"Certainly not. I can not doubt. It would be mad of me to say otherwise. And I must add that Frémart, with whom I spoke of the matter, was of the same opinion as myself. The Attorney-General also. It was only through a sentimental concession of the jury, due to the prisoner's elegant appearance, his protests and tears, the admirable dignity of his mother's deposition, and the honorable position of the family, that extenuating circumstances were alleged, which saved the poor fellow's life. But for these he would have been condemned to death. The court was so fixed in its conviction that it would not have diminished the penalty—it would have demanded the death of the guilty man."

"Well, my dear friend," said Tragomer, "it would doubly regret it to-day. And this is a very forcible argument against the death penalty, for it would have sent an innocent man to the scaffold."

"Come, come, Tragomer," said the magistrate with a roguish smile. "Do not jump to conclusions. It is easy to declare a condemned man innocent, but less easy to prove that he was not guilty."

"And yet that is what Marenval and myself have undertaken."

Pierre de Vesin looked with considerable curiosity at his two visitors, became serious, and said:

"Ah, ah! You two? Society men, who know nothing about legal procedure; quite sincere, I am certain, but foreign to all intrigue. And why this resolution, I beg of you? In the name of what? In what interest?"

Marenval spoke, in very simple words:

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"In the name of humanity. In the interest of justice."

The magistrate had no mean knowledge of men. He was well acquainted with Marenval, whom he had always looked upon as of rather mean intellect, of no importance outside of commerce, very material, and anxious rather to enjoy his immense fortune than to employ it in a manner calculated to bring him credit. He had seen him withdraw from the Fréneuse family at the very time he ought to have shown practical sympathy with them. The lack of heroism on the part of the former tradesman had not modified his opinion as to human generosity. He pricked up his ears when he heard him speak in such a resolute and noble fashion. For Marenval to be so decided and categorical there must be some solid foundation to this new conviction of his.

"Then you believe a miscarriage of justice has occurred?" he said, carefully looking at the two friends.

"We do. The family has never ceased to believe this, the accused man has always protested his innocence."

"It is always, or almost always, so. We should spend our whole life in revising trials if the demands of relatives and protests of innocence on the part of the condemned were listened to. Confession of crime is rare. It may astonish you, but things are at times so strange in legal affairs that we have had prisoners at the bar pleading 'guilty' when they were innocent. But this is only an exception, confirming the rule, as the grammar says."

"And yet," resumed Tragomer, "you will agree

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with me that it may appear extraordinary for a man to be condemned for the murder of a woman when that woman is still living and in good health?"

This time the magistrate made no attempt to curb his incredulity. With a pitying gesture he said in very gentle tones:

"Come, my dear friend, we must not fall into romantic complications. How do you expect to have a lawyer in the Assize Court like myself admit that an examining magistrate could have sent before the Court of Indictment, and the latter before the Assize Court, an accused man unless a crime had been committed? You forget that I have seen the brief, the report stating the particulars of the murder, the report of the inquest, the examination of the accused, who did not deny that he was in presence of his mistress's corpse, and then everything else confirming his guilt! Come! we are not children. Let us have no more idle stories."

"There is only one thing I can say," said Tragomer. "Jacques Fréneuse has been condemned for having killed Léa Pérelli, and Léa Pérelli is living."

"Have you seen her?" asked the magistrate in a tone of raillery.

"I have spoken to her," replied Tragomer gravely.

"Oh! oh!" said Pierre de Vesin, "when was that?"

"About three months ago."

"Where?"

"In San Francisco."

"And she confessed herself to be Léa Pérelli?"

"No, indeed, she did something better; she took to flight to escape investigation. Had she re-

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mained, I might have had my doubts. But she ran away. This, in my eyes, is the most conclusive proof."

"You have been the victim of a resemblance."

"No, no! It was Léa herself! What pains she has taken to change her name, disguise her voice, cease speaking French, and allow her hair to return to its natural color, or to wear a wig! Then, finally, the terror she experienced at seeing me, causing her to flee from me as she did. . . . It was, indeed, Léa Pérelli!"

"Then who was the poor woman found dead, who was interred in her place, after a post-mortem examination?"

"I will tell you some day; at present I do not know."

"Ah! Here is the break in the chain of evidence!" exclaimed the magistrate. "It is always so. In all these affairs connected with the reestablishing of innocence there is a point at which everything becomes disordered, and where the argument upheld is seen to be very improbable. Look at the Lesurques affair. What efforts were made to obtain redress of injury! There are people who believe that Lesurques had a double. The family, or what remains of it—for all this is very old—still maintains that the condemned man was innocent; they discuss, investigate, furnish proofs, and everything goes well until the moment when Lesurques's silver spur is found at Lieusaint, and then, crash! everything falls to pieces. With no more reasonable proofs to bring forward, we reach a climax

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where to win the case one must wait. It will be the same in this affair. You will build up a scaffolding which will rise easily to a certain height, then the perpendicular will be lost and everything will come falling down."

"You are terribly skeptical," said Marenval, considerably moved.

"That is my profession," replied Vesin. "We are not supposed to believe every tale we hear. We should come to a fine pass if we were to believe blindly everything related to us. Living is the very essence of humanity. Do you think it is for nothing that witnesses are obliged to swear that they will tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth under penalty of penal servitude? It is well known that even thus, in spite of everything, they will only say what they wish or are able to say. One must believe in part and disbelieve in part. Some are fools, the rest are of evil intent. As for the children, everything from them may be feared. They are a prey to a kind of inventive hysteria which forces them to relate tales—false, the greater part of the time. Accordingly, we must be specially on our guard against them. Skepticism in a magistrate is the beginning of wisdom."

"Still you admit, all the same, that justice may be mistaken?"

"Between ourselves, in strict intimacy, I do admit it," said Vesin laughingly. "But in public I would not admit it at all. I am well aware that justice is represented with a bandage over the eyes, but this travesty returns to the category of accessorio-

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ries, which are of no value except for the poets. Justice, which after all is an arbitrary power, ought to be immutable and infallible, without which it is impossible to enforce it. You see at once where we are marching if the respect for justice is not the corner-stone of society—straight to anarchy. That is why it is impossible to admit that justice is in the wrong. The litigant who has exhausted all the steps of jurisdiction, and who has failed, has twenty-four hours in which to curse his judges. Afterward he must submit. The condemned man, whose appeal has been rejected, can only bend beneath the weight of the sentence pronounced. That is the magistrate's opinion; he could not have any other. This will explain the resistance the administration has always offered to a demand for revision of the law. All authentication of error, however rare, seriously threatens the judicial edifice. The precautions taken by the law are numerous and circumstantial. All demands for revision must pass along a draw-plate, where they are obliged to remain behind—unless they are as strong as steel—and when they do finally issue, it is after delays and under such conditions that nothing is granted, so to speak. Present legislation, all the same, is far more liberal than the former. In bygone times, unless another accused had been condemned by another sentence for the same crime, no revision was possible. If the innocence of a condemned man were recognized, the poor fellow had to be pardoned. There was no other means of releasing him from prison."

"But that was monstrous!" exclaimed Marenval.

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"What! an unhappy man, unjustly prosecuted, who had undergone the torture of arrest, examination, sentence, which had formed a part of his penalty, could only benefit by a measure of clemency, not by an act of justice? Instead of having justice meted out to him, he was granted a pardon."

"That was already an improvement. Nowadays a new fact of such a nature as will establish the innocence of the accused is sufficient to enable the revision to be asked for. In the case in hand, it would be the existence of Léa Pérelli."

"Is not that sufficient?"

"It would be sufficient, if established. But how will you establish it? Your declaration will have nothing to rest upon. It will only avail as an opinion. Compared with all the testimony and proofs furnished by the trial, it will be of very slight weight. I give you my opinion as you have asked for it. Doubtless it is not encouraging, but I must be sincere."

"You may speak fully, and with perfect frankness," said Tragomer. "My mind is made up; nothing will change me. I may modify my method of procedure to reach the goal Marenval and I are marching toward, but nothing will be strong enough to turn us aside from our set purpose. There would be no more rest for us if we abandoned the cause of this unhappy man, convinced, as we are, of his innocence."

"You both appear to me to be animated by the noblest of intentions, but also the most inconsiderate—if I may say so. Your argument, based on the

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resemblance of a living woman with Fréneuse's victim, is very fragile, since you have no other reasons than sentimental ones to offer against my objections—such as the grief of the family, the protests of the condemned man. Are you forgetting that when Jacques de Fréneuse was arrested he was making preparations to start abroad? He had on his person 40,000 francs which he could not account for. It was well known that he was ruined, head over ears in debt. The previous night he had paid in 50,000 francs to the club, when just on the point of being exposed. Léa Pérelli's jewels, too—strange coincidence—which were known to be of great value, had disappeared. Investigation is made, and it is proved that they have been pawned for 100,000 francs. But they only remained a couple of days in pledge. The next morning but one they were redeemed by a woman wearing a mask, probably on account of one of the numerous purchasers of pawn-tickets, who swarm in Paris. Fréneuse acknowledged that it was he who had pawned the jewels, which, he said, had been voluntarily given up to him by his mistress. But he denied the sale of the pledges, which he pretended to have returned to Léa Pérelli with a note for 100,000 francs, which his family, he alleged, would certainly have discharged, and which, he supposed, freed him from his debt toward that girl. Now, the note was presented when due. Accordingly, Jacques de Fréneuse had evidently taken back the note after the murder. Probably he killed the woman with the sole purpose of securing the note. And it was he who put it in circulation



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the very morning following. For, it must be observed, a whole day lapsed between the discovery of the crime and the arrest. Do you dream of trying to set in motion the whole judicial machine, through confidence in a resemblance, more or less certain? It is sheer madness! From the very outset you will meet with material difficulties and moral impossibilities so serious that you will be forced to stop at once."

"If I wished to discuss," replied Tragomer, "I might do so; and, perhaps, more easily than you may imagine. But what is the use? It would only be an exchange of empty words. It would be vain for me to supply you with acceptable arguments—you would not admit them. What is required is to bring you the proof that Léa Pérelli is living. The important thing is to prove to Jacques that she whom he considered dead is still alive. Do not forget that it is through faith in your affirmations that he believes her dead. He has had no doubt of your proofs. You have shown him a woman, half-disfigured, possessed of the form, hair, clothes, and rings of Léa Pérelli. Overwhelmed by anguish, and blinded by grief, he scarcely cast an affrighted glance on the victim, lying stretched out on that horrible slab in the Morgue. Turning away his head, he acquiesced in everything he was told. How could he have denied the evidence? Was the Léa found dead at her home any other than his Léa? He could only say one thing, and this he cried out most pathetically, that he was not the assassin. Caught in the snares of the examination, overwhelmed by a mass of

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evidence, the revelation of an atrociously skilful hand, he could do nothing but protest. This he did madly, the whole time, until he ended by exasperating both judges and jury. For the poor fellow appeared to be cynical when he was only innocent. If all who had to formulate an opinion as to his guilt had not been influenced by the examination—had they reflected for a moment on the frightful resemblance existing between the indignant stupefaction of a prisoner before the bar incapable of proving his innocence and the the hardened insolence of a guilty man who obstinately denies his crime—they would have hesitated when pronouncing sentence. Prejudiced, however, as they were—sure beforehand of a guilt attested to by men in whom they had a well-merited confidence—they were all disposed to condemn, and they did condemn in accordance with their conscience. When they are shown the living woman, they will be obliged to confess that they have been mistaken. Then a search to discover who the dead woman was will be made. And it is probable that an atrocious plot to ruin an unhappy man will be brought to light.”

“My dear friend,” said the magistrate, “all this is romance, not reality. You are dreaming, wide awake. That will pass away. But permit me to say that if, by a stroke of good luck, you succeed in collecting sufficient proof of what you now advance in so bold a fashion, you may flatter yourself that you will produce no ordinary sensation. The social rank of the condemned man, the attention the affair created, the personality of the chevaliers who under-

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took to right the injustice, would give the case quite a special interest. I should then be very glad to witness your triumph. But do not forget that I scarcely believe this will happen, and that I have predicted that you will receive a practically certain check."

"Well!" said Tragomer, "if the attempt is vain, we shall at least have tried to succeed. And that will be something to relieve our minds, will it not, Marenval?"

"Yes, my dear friend. What Vesin has just said fixes my decision. I hesitated somewhat, I must confess, even after the assurances you had given me. But, really, the infallibility of justice is a dogma as impossible to admit as the infallibility of the Pope. No person, no thing in the world is infallible. This, with your help, I will attempt to prove. There will be material difficulties, but I have the money necessary to smooth them over. There will also be moral obstacles, but you have the necessary intelligence to overcome them. My money and your brain will strive in friendly emulation. And we shall see whether or not, in the times in which we are living, there still exist bastiles at the foundation of which prejudices, obstinacies, and error can be sheltered from examination and discussion. What! We have reached a point at which the Socialists pretend that to-morrow they will take from me all I possess; and amid such a universal destruction of all kinds of rights, authorities, and hierarchies, shall justice alone remain unassailable? Nonsense! If it is to be respected, it must be human, otherwise it will be swept away like the rest."

## STEP BY STEP AGAINST ERROR

"Bravo, Marenval!" exclaimed Vesin. "You are becoming quite eloquent. On to the fight, my valiant hero! My best wishes and prayers are with you. You have retired from business; the enterprise to which you are devoting yourself will occupy your entire attention. That is better than playing at poker or baccarat. If you need advice, I shall be only too glad to give it you, for I should be sorry if you considered me impregnable against reason or pity. But, remember, the struggle you are entering upon is that of the earthen pot against the iron kettle. I have spoken to you as a friend; address yourself to any magistrate whatever. According to the temper he is in, he will tell you ironically to go through the whole necessary routine, by approaching the Keeper of the Seals, or else will indignantly declare that you are issuing a challenge to justice."

"It is this very challenge that we are issuing!" exclaimed Marenval.

"But we do not intend to approach any other than yourself. I wanted to speak to some competent person before thoroughly embarking into the matter. I can well understand, notwithstanding your kind welcome and the cordiality of your words, that at every step we shall meet with a resistance at once professional and systematic. The magistracy will not let go its prey. That is its principle, and, at the same time, a safeguard for society. Every accused man ought to become a condemned man, and every condemned man to remain guilty. Very good. I now know all I wanted, and shall act in consequence."

## Chapter XI

### A DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO RESCUE JACQUES DE FRÉNEUSE

"MIGHT I ask what you are going to do?" said the lawyer inquisitively.

"We must understand each other well," said Tragomer. "Up to the present I have spoken to the magistrate. Now I will only speak to the man, to the friend. Any act of indiscretion on what Marenval and I are about to attempt might have such grave consequences that we should be mad if we laid ourselves open to betrayal."

Pierre de Vesin looked at the two companions with anxious gravity.

"Do you doubt me? Must I ask you to say nothing further after soliciting your confidence?"

"No," said Tragomer, "and in proof of our confidence in you I will explain everything."

"I, too, give you my word of honor that I will immediately forget what you tell me."

They shook hands affectionately, after which Tragomer took a cigarette, and began as calmly as tho he had been giving an account of a pleasure party.

"You understand, that our great concern is not

## RESCUE OF JACQUES DE FRÉNEUSE

to alarm the real culprits, for if by ill luck they became informed of our plans, they would take every precaution, and nothing could be done. If Léa Pérelli disappeared, everything would be lost. Besides, I can well imagine that the rascal who worked out the trap in which Jacques de Fréneuse was caught would be quite capable of ridding himself of her, if he saw the necessity for such a course. Accordingly, all public pursuit of claim is impossible for the moment. Had you shown me the legal machine ready to work in the revision of the trial—had you proved to me the kindly interest of the Keeper of the Seals, I would still have refrained, at present, from appealing to justice in the matter, or submitting new facts such as might render revision a necessity. At the very first rumor all our proofs would disappear, and we should find ourselves disarmed. The principal thing is to have the culprits in our power without any possibility of their escape. Then we shall advance. So, you see, we have inquiries to make, a prosecution to work out, and perhaps even more serious resolutions to take; who knows? But this will depend on how events turn out. In the first place, we must put ourselves in touch with Jacques de Fréneuse, to inform him of the fact that Léa Pérelli is alive, and, with him, to judge, after a long and deliberative interview, the consequences this unexpected fact may bring to light."

"You intend to start for Nouméa?" exclaimed Vesin, overcome by uncontrollable astonishment.

"We intend to start for Nouméa," declared Marenval coldly.

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"There," said Tragomer, "we will arrange our plans with Fréneuse without the administration being able to guess our projects. Writing would have been too dangerous. Letters received by the convicts are opened and their replies read. Accordingly, we shall study the situation *viva voce*, and shall draw from it such conclusions as are required."

"Tragomer, you are not telling me everything," exclaimed the magistrate excitedly. "You still mistrust me. You intend to help Jacques de Fréneuse to escape."

Tragomer made no reply; he merely smiled, but Marenval sat upright and said, with extraordinary energy and passion:

"Well, suppose it were so? Do you think that if we are certain this poor fellow is innocent, we shall let him perish slowly in the horrors of your bagnios? Certainly we shall carry him off. Since we are making the voyage, we may well allow ourselves this slight distraction."

"But there are guards, a regular garrison, a vigilant patrol-boat," said Vesin. "It is downright madness. If you are caught, you will incur fearful responsibilities. And be sure that, if they catch you, they will hold your life of little value."

"That is our business," declared Marenval. "You must know, my dear friend, that we are not flinging ourselves into such an adventure without being prepared to sacrifice our lives. Still, Tragomer and myself have quite made up our minds to defend ourselves."

"Not a word more. In my opinion you must be

## RESCUE OF JACQUES DE FRÉNEUSE

mad. It is 'Monte Cristo' over again. You are half a century behind the times, my friends. From the outset you will be opposed by such difficulties that you will never continue in your enterprise. Take my word for it, your only hope is in a legal interpolation. Write a memorandum, address it to the Minister. A police inquiry, well carried out, might——"

"Ruin everything in a moment," interrupted Tragomer. "I know with whom I have to deal. We must proceed very discreetly, or we shall fail."

"And we intend to succeed!" exclaimed Marenval.

"How do you intend to travel to New Caledonia?"

"On a yacht we shall charter. We must have at our disposal the best and most rapid means of action possible."

"And you will introduce yourselves to the colonial authorities?"

"As tourists."

"Ah! ah!" said the magistrate, as tho in a reverie. "This is one of the most extraordinary things I have heard of for a long time. People say that the end of the century is exclusively practical, egotistic, and a foe to all sentiment. Here is something to furnish our latter-day philosophers with food for reflection. What will be said by those who assure us that individual energy is dead in France? Here we are in the presence of one of those cases of exaltation only met with in stirring revolutionary times. What you are about to attempt is rash to such a degree that you are quite capable of success."



## IN DEEP ABYSS

After all, it is only unlikely enterprises that have any chance of success. What is simple and commonplace is foreseen; one is on one's guard against the routine of probable events. But such a mad freebooter's enterprise, prepared and carried out by calm men in cold blood—— Ah! There is nothing to prove that you will not succeed. When do you expect to start?"

"As soon as possible. After making our preparations we shall cross over to England."

"Will you charter an English ship?"

"Yes; a privateer captain and a French crew shall share our responsibility. We do not mind compromising ourselves, but ourselves only."

They had risen to leave. Twilight filled the room, and in the semi-obscurity their countenances lost their real aspect. Marenval shuddered. He seemed to be in the presence of specters. A feeling of anguish filled his heart, and a sensation of giddiness came over him, when he heard Vesin say in solemn tones:

"In truth, the matter is a very serious one. It will be an Assize Court case for those who allow themselves to be caught, and if by ill luck a man dies——"

"Oh! we will try to do everything quietly," said Marenval, in a tremulous voice.

"In any case, even if you spare the lives of others each of you risks his own. The regulations are not by any means mild in penitentiary colonies, and the restraints are severe."

"We know what we are risking," said Tragomer.

## RESCUE OF JACQUES DE FRENEUSE

"We are acting under considerations which can not be compared with the risks to be run."

"And nothing will force us to draw out of it now," stammered Marenval.

"Forsooth!" exclaimed Vesin, "if I were not restrained by my professional engagements, if I were free, I would set off with you, simply for the voyage. But you will agree with me that a lawyer would perhaps be somewhat out of place in such an expedition."

"I think so," said Tragomer; "but do not be discouraged, we will bring you back a collection of photographs."

Thus this grave conversation ended in a jest. Vesin turned on the electricity, and the whole room was flooded with light, which caused the gilt picture-frames to sparkle and threw dazzling reflections on enamels and fine porcelain. All this modern luxury, suddenly revealed in the light that had burst on them, formed so complete a contrast with the plans developed in the dreamlike obscurity that had preceded it that the three men stared at one another, as tho they needed confirmation of the reality of their presence. Tragomer, however, smiled reassuringly, and in the brilliant light Marenval regained all his courage.

"We shall see one another in four months," said Vesin, "for you will be back in Paris before then. In the mean time, if I can be of any service to you, I shall be only too glad to help you."

"My dear friend, if we succeed we shall return with our hands so full of proofs that it will be impossible to refuse us justice."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"Amen!" said the magistrate. "A pleasant voyage and a quick return." Holding out his hand, he said: "You may be a couple of madcaps, but your project is anything but ordinary, and from my heart I admire you."

"My dear friend," said Tragomer, "I am risking the enterprise because I love Mademoiselle de Fréneuse, and in trying to reinstate her brother I am working for myself. Therefore, any merit that may attach itself to me is indeed slight. The real hero is Marenval, for he is devoting himself to honor alone."

At these words, which deeply touched him, Marenval turned pale, tears filled his eyes, and he made an effort to speak, but without success; he stood there trembling with emotion before his two friends. Finally, he shook his head, heaved a sigh which was almost a sob, and throwing himself into his relative's arms, said:

"Good-by, Vesin. You know now what to think of me. If I am attacked, and am no longer in a position to defend myself, come to my help. Do not let them treat me as an imbecile." Then with a wild look, he again said, "Good-by."

And taking Tragomer by the arm, he left the house as tho he were going to his doom.

## Chapter XII

### CRITICAL INTERVIEWS

MR. HARVEY owned one of the finest private hotels on the United States Square. He had considered it patriotic to fix his abode on this square, because it was named after his country. It was a pleasure for him to say that he was at once in Paris and in America. He would, however, have returned home long ago, had not his daughter energetically declared that under no pretext would she consent to leave Europe. Then the father had said to his daughter:

"My dear child, if you will have your own way, then marry. I, too, have a will of my own, and I intend to live, if possible, in a way not altogether disagreeable to me."

"How can it be disagreeable to remain in countries that contain everything calculated to make life perfectly happy?"

"I am not perfectly happy if I do not live in America at least six months every year."

"I believe you are still a regular Indian." And Harvey had answered this pertinent remark of his daughter's with an indulgent smile:

"Very possibly. I really believe I am."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"Then I shall marry, since that will make life easier for both of us."

"Whom will you marry, my dear? A European or an American?"

"A European; very probably a Frenchman."

"Ah! a society man. I see."

"Certainly. My brothers supply as much clownish company as I require. I want to live with some one who is well bred."

"You are perfectly free."

"I know. You, too, will be free afterward."

The squatter, who had spent so much energy in building up a fortune and raising ranchos, where hundreds of thousands of oxen grazed on the thick grass of the Indian prairie, had never been able to resist the will of Miss Maud. And as he was above all practical, he ended by obeying her. This course did away with discussions and simplified their relations toward each other. In America it was a strange sight to see these Harveys, father and sons, yield to every whim of this frail, dark-complexioned girl. Miss Maud had more ideas in her head than the brains of all her brothers could have furnished. This young girl's will recalled her father's tenacity of character, modified by a slight nervousness which attested the refined manners of her sex. Harvey knew this, and was amused at it. He would acknowledge it and say:

"My three sons together can not be compared with their sister. If nature had not made a mistake by creating her a girl, my fortune would have been increased tenfold. These young men will be able to

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do nothing but share it." As a further proof of the affection and high esteem in which he held her, he said:

"My daughter spends money well."

By that he meant that Maud could be lavish when circumstances rendered it necessary, but was actually economical in the ordinary course of life. For a year he had been with her in France, and was becoming bored in a superior kind of way. He understood nothing of the minutiae and finesse of Parisian life. Accustomed always to express his opinion of things in very direct way, he created considerable astonishment by giving vent to sentiments in themselves as strange as the words in which they were couched. The moral frankness of this Yankee was out of harmony with the subtle hypocrisy of the society in which he lived. When he spoke without giving due thought to his words the cries and protests of his startled audience conveyed the impression that he was firing revolver shots into a pigeon-house.

He was so rich that he had been welcomed eagerly everywhere. Society in Paris is no longer closed. The economic changes introduced into France during the last thirty years have so modified the fortunes of the aristocracy, devoted through pride to a state of idleness, that they have found themselves incapable of living on their incomes, and have accordingly been compelled to understand that concessions must be made to money. A preliminary social revolution, in the sense of the leveling of castes, has been effected, and is nothing but the prelude to that complete and

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rapid fusion about to come into operation between the bourgeoisie and the nobility under the power of money. In the near future there will be only two classes—those who do and those who do not own property. And it is between these two classes, in which the different factions of French society will become unified, that the struggle, already engaged in for centuries, for the possession of authority, by means of wealth and intelligence, will take place.

In a society so open to the influence of money, in which the foreign colony is quite at home, Harvey could not help being well received. He gave receptions, owned a yacht, was capable of lending five hundred napoleons without ever asking for them back, his daughter was elegant, original, and dowered in princely fashion. This was more than was needed to bring him into favor. He had been admitted into the Automobile Club, and was an influential member of the Guide Society and the Yacht Union. Nevertheless, he was bored to death. To this "Indian," as his daughter called him, the atmosphere of the salons was stifling. He yawned away his evenings at the opera, and with equal indifference won or lost at poker, and was never himself except when seated on his four-in-hand, handling four Kentucky horses, or on board his 1,200-ton yacht, a regular transatlantic, manned by a crew of sixty sailors, and armed with six guns, with which he might have defended himself, tho they were used only for saluting whenever entering harbor.

From the first he had felt an antipathy toward the

## CRITICAL INTERVIEWS

Count de Sorège. This icy cold, circumspect diplomat, who never said a third of what he thought, and never looked one straight in the face, was extremely distasteful to him. Sorège's nature was the exact antithesis of his own. The day his daughter had told him she was engaged to this young nobleman he had ventured on a few questions:

"Are you certain, Maud, that Monsieur de Sorège is the man who will best suit you? Have you studied his disposition, and are you sure that you will not regret having given him your promise?"

Miss Harvey very calmly explained to her father the reasons which had influenced her choice.

"Count Jean is of very good family. In this country, as everywhere, father, there are to be found the good and the bad, the true and the false. Not to be deceived by counterfeit goods is wise. It is well known that we Americans are sadly lacking in knowledge. People are constantly trying to foist on us copied paintings, made-up tapestry, artificial trinkets, and pseudo-noblemen. Consequently, we must be very particular, and inquire into and test everything so as not to have palmed off on us the imitation for the reality. This is what I have done. Monsieur de Sorège is connected with the very best of society; he has a suitable fortune, is an attaché to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, speaks English correctly, and is very well bred. These are the reasons that I am engaged to him."

"He never looks at one straightforwardly, but always just as tho he were a rock owlet."

"I assure you he looks me full in the face."



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"Can he even ride a horse? He is never seen except in the salons."

"Certainly he is not a gaucho. But he will accompany us for a ride whenever we invite him."

"Does he hunt?"

"All the French hunt."

"Can he shoot?"

"In all probability; but he is no Buffalo Bill. You don't expect him to go hunting bisons and shooting grizzlies, do you?"

"I believe this man's strength lies in his head," said Harvey, with disdain, "and that his legs and arms are of very little value."

"He can speak well, and that suits me. You will have your sons for physical exercise and my husband for intellectual recreation."

"Well, well, Maud, you are free!"

The squatter received Sorège with perfect cordiality, as it was not his nature to discuss matters already determined. He thumped his knees, heavily enough to shake him had he been a buffalo, and noticed, with considerable pleasure, that the young fellow did not wince. Sorège was also able to stand the cocktail test successfully. He was one of those men who can drink with impunity, because they speak little, and do not bewilder themselves by their own excitement. He could mount the coach, handle the reins properly when Harvey feigned weariness, and turn at full speed with the greatest ease.

At Havre he boarded the yacht, and showed that he was quite at home on the water. Harvey could not find any fault with him, and was obliged to confess

## CRITICAL INTERVIEWS

that he was an all-round sportsman. Yet he did not feel attracted toward him with that feeling of sympathy which to him was free and essential. Between Sorège and himself there seemed always to be a veil, that of the former's eyelids which habitually concealed his glance.

To test his future son-in-law more thoroughly, Harvey pretended he would have to introduce him to his sons to show him his property and explain his projects, so he took him to America. When they returned, Harvey's ideas had undergone no change. He confessed he had no fault to find with Sorège except that he did not please him. On his return he said to his friend and compatriot, Sam Weller:

"During the three months we lived with the Count I have never seen him do, nor heard him say anything wrong. Believe me if you like, Sam, but I would have given ten thousand dollars to have caught him swearing, or seizing one of the chambermaids around the waist. But nothing of the kind happened. This man is too perfect; I am afraid of him."

Possibly the resistance her father opposed to the fiancé of her choice had made Miss Harvey smile more encouragingly on the Count's suit. Never had she given evidence of such interest in the projected wedding as when her fiancé returned. To her until then Sorège had been in the eyes of the world nothing but a simple flirt. On his return to Paris the Count was proclaimed as her intended husband.

It was then that the news of this brilliant union became known in the Paris clubs, and was announced

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to Tragomer. The squatter was too popular in fashionable society to be unknown to Marenval. The retired tradesman had had an introduction to Harvey, which had been the subject of gossip in the salons for twenty-four hours. They had met at a dinner given by an American lady, well known for the eccentricity of her language and her passion for music. The two men had been introduced to each other by the mistress of the house.

"Monsieur Marenval, my compatriot, Julius Harvey."

The two men had bowed, and Harvey, stretching out his hand to Marenval, said with a broad smile:

"Ah, Marenval & Co., I suppose. I know you quite well. It is Harvey & Co. who have supplied you with all the pine timber for your packing-cases at Chaminade, in Bordeaux, for the last twenty years. Delighted to make your acquaintance."

The expression depicted on the countenance of Marenval, whose chief aim was to cause others to forget the source of his fortune, had afforded those present much delight. From this introduction dated the aversion which Cyprien had evidently nourished toward Harvey, and, really, toward all Americans, whom he included in the feelings the squatter had inspired in him. He cast glances of pity on Miss Maud when she passed in front of him in a loud, brisk way, and the idea that one could think of marrying a girl of such boyish manners appeared to him utterly incomprehensible. Now that he knew that the Count de Sorège was to be the happy man, he said in sneering tones:

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"What a happy selection. A fine match it will be, a hypocrite with that brazen-faced girl!"

Almost on the eve of their departure, Tragomer and Marenval had met Harvey, his daughter, and his future son-in-law at a dinner given by Mrs. Weller. Sorège was passing the review of the American colony, and philosophically underwent all the congratulations of his fiancée's compatriots. A slight contraction of the eyebrow alone showed how vexed he was at seeing Marenval and Tragomer enter the room. However, he smiled in a friendly way, and listened quietly as Harvey explained the commercial relations that formerly existed between the firms of Harvey & Co. and Marenval & Co.

But when Sam Weller had introduced Tragomer to Miss Maud and spoken of the voyage round the world the young man had just accomplished, Sorège noticed with vexation that the squatter had conceived a sudden interest in Christian. After the dinner, which was a sumptuous one, accompanied with music that rendered all conversation impossible, and reduced the repast to a simple gastronomic exhibition, the guests made their way to the admirable salons of the Weller Hotel. Sam led the men into the smoking-room.

There were collected the finest paintings of the modern schools, bought for large sums by the ostentatious American. Here Delacroix's "Massacre in a Mosque" hung alongside of Decamps's "Apes' Concert," and the "Reapers' Lunch," Millet's finest painting, had as its companion Corot's "Dance of the Nymphs." The "Sunset" of Diaz, the "River

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Bank" of Dupré, and Rousseau's "Grands Bois Rouillés," contrasted oddly with Troyen's bold pasture scenes and Meissonier's unrivaled sketches. Harvey lit a cigar and made his way toward Marenval and Tragomer, who were seated near Sorège, to show them his friend's pictures.

"Sam Weller has a fine gallery, but if ever you visit my home in Dakota, you will see that my pictures are the equal of his. The only difference is that I have none but old masters—Rembrandt, Raphael, Titian, Velasquez, Hobbéma."

Marenval cast a sly glance at Harvey and said:

"Those are the easiest to copy."

"Oh, but I have none but the originals!"

"That is what all collectors claim, and the dealers never tell them the contrary."

"But Sam Weller's paintings are all genuine."

"Indeed!" said Marenval, doubtingly.

"The artists who have painted them are known. Certain people who saw them painted are still alive."

"Who has guaranteed your Rembrandts and your Hobbémas?" asked Marenval ironically. "Perhaps some one living has seen them painted too?"

"Ah, you Frenchmen are dreadfully skeptical," said Harvey calmly. "But I have bought these pictures, and if, after they have hung in my gallery for thirty years, and every one who knows me has seen them there, I should want to sell them, no one will suggest that they are counterfeit, because they come from my house and I am very well known."

"Ha!" said Tragomer, "that kind of reasoning is

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rather appropriate. It is the setting that gives value to the goods. Does not the sole merit of certain pictures bought at a very high price consist in the name of their collector?"

"You are heaping ridicule on us Americans," resumed Harvey, "because we are ingenuous. You look upon us almost as savages who dance with joy at the sight of paltry glass trinkets. There is some basis for your judgment. But this ingenuousness is not permanent. We shall become polished in time, and when we know our own strength we shall be able to do without Europe; then we shall manufacture our own counterfeit pictures. Even in the last twenty years we have taken great strides forward. Every year we draw nearer perfection. We are already sending you leather, wood, machines, horses, wheat. Soon we shall supply you with everything."

"Perhaps even cannon balls; who knows?" said Marenval bitterly.

"God forbid," replied Harvey. "We should indeed be ungrateful sons, for we owe everything to Europe, which gave us our very birth, and particularly to France, which helped us obtain our liberty."

"Nobly spoken," said Tragomer.

"In America, we love the French," continued Harvey.

"Your daughters love them even more than yourselves," interrupted Marenval.

Harvey smiled.

"True, the French are a lovable race, delicate

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and well bred. They have only one fault; they are too fond of their country, do not travel enough—one must always go to them. I am not thinking of you, Monsieur de Tragomer, for you are quite a globe-trotter. But you, Marenval, with all your fortune, surely you ought to travel."

Vanity was Marenval's weak point. He could not resist the temptation of dazzling Harvey, and, without measuring the importance of what he was saying, he exclaimed:

"Well, Harvey, your wish will shortly be fulfilled. I am about to start with Monsieur de Tragomer on a voyage over the sea."

He paused. Christian laid his hand on his arm, and pressed warningly. The Count de Sorège, sitting in an arm-chair calmly smoking, without appearing to attach the slightest importance to the words exchanged near him, had risen and approached the group of which Harvey was the center. The latter, interested by Marenval's thoughtless outburst, asked:

"Where are you going?"

Marenval, abashed, made no reply. Tragomer took it on himself to explain matters.

"Marenval and I have made up our minds to take a trip on the Mediterranean. We shall go as far as Smyrna and return by way of Tunis and Algiers."

"Ah," said Harvey indulgently, "a fine beginning. Monsieur de Tragomer will take care of Marenval. I suppose you already have your sea-legs, Marenval?"

"I have never been to sea," acknowledged Cyp-

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rien, "but I do not suppose it is more difficult than some other things."

"For one who is free to do as he pleases, I tell you, Marenval, there is no sensation to be compared with that of feeling oneself master of his own ship out in midocean between sea and sky. There you are really alone with God. But so far as your inland sea is concerned you will scarcely be out of sight of land. It is as tho I were going for a short trip on the Ontario or the Erie. Come aboard my yacht, Marenval, with Monsieur de Tragomer. I will take you where you please. I have long felt a desire to go to Ceylon. Now will be the opportunity."

"Thank you, Harvey," replied Marenval; "for a preliminary trial, our inland sea, as you disdainfully call the Mediterranean—a very stormy sea, by the way—will be quite sufficient for me."

"How will you sail?" asked Harvey.

"We have a yacht in view," said Tragomer, "the one in which Lord Spydell sailed to the Cape last year. It is a fine little craft of more than 180 feet in length, quite seaworthy, and able to steam twelve knots an hour. The crew comprises twenty-six men. The rigging calls for two masts, which will permit of our setting sail, thus husbanding our stock of coal."

"Besides, we shall have four fine guns aboard," added Marenval, who seemed determined to speak every time he should have held his tongue.

"And what do you mean to do with that artillery?" said a jesting voice behind them. "Do you intend to bombard Malta or capture Tripoli?"



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Tragomer turned round. Sorège stood there smiling enigmatically.

"Oh," replied Christian. "The guns were there; so we left them. Besides, after all, the sea about Morocco is none too safe. Quite recently a trading vessel was overhauled by pirates. If necessary, we shall be in a position to defend ourselves."

"Ah, Monsieur Marenval would indeed be a good capture! He would be offered to ransom. But this idea of a trip by sea has come to you quite suddenly; you were not thinking of it, I think, when we were talking the other day?"

"No; it is Marenval who has won me over," said Tragomer carelessly. "I should have been glad of a rest this winter. Whatever Mr. Harvey may say, uninterrupted locomotion for a whole year is extremely fatiguing. Here, however, we can rest on shore whenever we like. Our stays in port will be longer than our excursions on the open sea. Who knows? Perhaps we shall take some friends with us? I have thought of asking Maugiron. With him we should be certain to feed well; he would undertake to look after the provisions and the cooking."

"Then, if I call at Nice or Monaco," asked Sorège, "I may come across you?"

"Certainly, my dear friend. If you will meet us at Marseilles in about a fortnight, we will take you there by sea."

At this offer Sorège's features relaxed. Shaking his head, he said cordially:

"I am very grateful for your kindness, but I cannot leave Paris. Miss Harvey would be surprised,

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and justly so; besides, I am not inclined to leave her. I will follow you then only in imagination, unless you would be good enough to write to me, in which case I could desire nothing further."

"Meanwhile, my dear friend," interrupted Tragomer, who saw that his wily adversary was attempting to win him over, "please introduce me as you have promised to do to Miss Maud Harvey."

"With the greatest possible pleasure. Unless Mr. Harvey will take upon himself the trifling ceremony."

"Certainly," said the American proudly. "I believe my daughter will be very pleased to make your acquaintance, Monsieur de Tragomer."

They passed into the salon, where Mrs. Weller, in the center of a circle of women and young girls, was testing a wonderful phonograph she had just received from America. It was the very latest thing out, and reproduced accurately the voices of the singers and the sounds of the instruments. A nigger troupe, to banjo accompaniment, was giving a new song, then all the rage in America, the chorus of which was a wild shout, that kept time with a jerky dance. The shrill chords of the mandolins could be heard clearly, as well as the violent cries of the singers themselves. Everything was reproduced, even the peripatetic movement of the minstrels' feet and the cries of delight raised by the enthusiastic audience.

"Now, if you wish it," said the mistress of the house, "I will let you hear Patti or President McKinley."

Harvey and Tragomer advanced toward Miss

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Maud, while the apparatus was being arranged, and, as Mr. McKinley was just commencing: "Fellow citizens"—the squatter, presenting the young man, said to his daughter:

"Allow me, Maud, to introduce to you the Viscount de Tragomer, one of your future husband's friends. Monsieur de Tragomer, Miss Harvey, my daughter."

The girl smiled and her small, thin face brightened. Pointing to a chair by the side of her own, she said to Christian in clear, dictatorial tones:

"Take a seat here. I shall be very pleased to have a chat with you. I have wanted to make your acquaintance for some time. We have mutual friends who have often spoken of you in my presence."

"Your fiancé?"

"No. Monsieur de Sorège, on the contrary, has never mentioned your name. . . . All the same, I know you have been friends for many years. You must not be surprised at my being so well informed. I am of an inquisitive nature, bent on knowing something of those whose acquaintance I make or with whom I connect myself—and one can not connect oneself to another more closely than in marriage. Therefore, I like to meet my future husband's friends on terms of intimacy. . . . People may be judged very correctly by their acquaintance. . . . Why does Monsieur de Sorège never speak of you? Are you not friends?"

Tragomer, rather surprised by so much boldness, bowed his head to conceal his embarrassment. It was repugnant to him to give Miss Harvey false as-

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surances, and he did not care to acknowledge any lack of friendship in his relations with Sorège. A single word from the young American girl to her fiancé would have sufficed to put the latter on his guard.

"So far are we from being unfriendly that, had not your father been bent on doing me the honor of presenting me to you personally, Sorège himself would have done so."

"All the better! I wish Monsieur de Sorège had several friends like you. . . . He used to have very bad ones. . . . Who was this Monsieur de Fréneuse, who ended so badly?"

At this unexpected question Christian blushed. He looked closely at Miss Harvey. Since he had had to deal with Sorège, he was on his guard against everything. He suspected that this young American girl served, quite unconsciously, as an ally to the man who never looked one full in the face, and that the test to which he was being put had been prepared as a trap. He wished to sound the depths of Miss Maud's thoughts.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, M. de Fréneuse was a poor fellow whom both Monsieur de Sorège and I had known from childhood, whose adventures were a cause of great sorrow to all who loved him."

"Why is Monsieur de Sorège so extremely reserved in speaking of these adventures, and of their hero? On this subject I have never been able to draw from him anything but vague and sorrowful replies."

"But why are you so inquisitive, Mademoiselle?"

"Oh! I have many friends who are regular scan-

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dalmongers and not at all afraid of giving vent to idle gossip concerning whatever happens without their help or intervention. My proposed marriage to Monsieur de Sorège has been much discussed. But, as no fault could be found with his personal conduct, it appears that they try to fall back on his relations with people. . . . That is how I have been led to interest myself in this unfortunate Monsieur de Fréneuse. Some people were not far from giving me to understand that the Count, having been on intimate terms with so great a culprit, might well be as great a one himself. Naturally, I treated these absurd statements with the scorn they deserved. But I questioned the Count Jean concerning his former friend, and, despite the fact that he is generally a thorough master of himself, he became quite troubled, and appeared to be uneasy. Then I made up my mind to bring this matter to daylight. Now is a good opportunity, for here you are seated by my side, and we can talk at our ease while all these women waste their time in listening to all the silly nonsense emitted by that silly instrument."

"Indeed, Miss Harvey, I can hardly understand why a young girl like yourself, without any care or anxiety, should give her attention to such painful questions as the one you now wish to discuss. But, if it is compromising to have been a friend to Jacques de Fréneuse, permit me to say that I, too, was his friend."

"Yes, but you have defended him, you are not afraid to speak about him; it does not disturb you

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to hear his name mentioned. Please understand I am accustomed to think quite logically and to speak very frankly. In this Fréneuse affair, so far as Monsieur de Sorège is concerned, there is something which shocks me. . . . What is it? You must know. Tell me."

Christian sat there motionless.

"I have nothing to tell you, Miss Maud, except that Jacques de Fréneuse has never ceased to protest his innocence, and that certain of his friends, in spite of proof and appearance to the contrary, have never believed in his guilt."

"Are you one of these, Monsieur de Tragomer?"

"Yes, Mademoiselle, I am."

"And up to the present have you done anything to prove that you are mistaken?"

"What could have I have done? The law has pronounced its verdict."

"Suppose it is in the wrong?"

"The law is not in the wrong. It is sometimes deceived, but that is not the same thing."

"Then was there any one in this affair to whose interest it was to pervert justice?"

"Perhaps."

"Do you know the man?"

"No, Mademoiselle, I do not."

At that moment the Count de Sorège, uneasy at the prolonged conversation between Tragomer and his fiancé, crossed the threshold of the salon. Miss Harvey, in rather blunt way, signaled to him with her fan to approach. Then, with that inconsiderate ardor peculiar to her, she said:

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"Come here for a moment, Count. I am delighted that my father has introduced your friend to me. He has been interesting me immensely, speaking about this Jacques de Fréneuse, of whom you will tell us nothing. Why did you not tell me that you considered him innocent?"

"I should like to believe it," said Sorège, with hollow voice.

"Then you are either less ingenuous or less indulgent than Monsieur de Tragomer, for he admits that the condemned man was innocent."

The Count bowed his head sadly.

"He has too many reasons to wish Fréneuse to be innocent, not to be brought to admit what he wishes."

"What reasons has he more than yourself?" asked the young American girl eagerly. "He was this unfortunate man's friend, like yourself, no more than——"

"Has he not told you of the bond which attaches him to the Fréneuse family?"

Miss Maud looked straight at Tragomer.

## Chapter XIII

### THE PLOT THICKENS

THE young man smiled sadly.

"It is true I was the fiancé of Mademoiselle de Fréneuse when the catastrophe happened, and then all our plans were broken. Oh! I reproach myself, it was my fault. I was lacking in constancy and firmness. I should have openly scorned and braved public opinion. In the uncertainty of the first few days I was weak enough to be influenced by scandalous and cowardly counsel. I somewhat neglected his poor mother and sister, when my devotion to them ought to have been doubled. . . . I acted like Sorège, like all the rest. I shunned misfortune. And when ashamed of my conduct, I returned, begging for pardon, I found the door closed on me, and nothing but disdain instead of affection. That is the reason I have been traveling, for the past eighteen months, in every part of the world, unable to forget my cowardly conduct. There is my history, Mademoiselle. As you see, it is not a brilliant one. It is that, too, of all the friends of Jacques de Fréneuse, only aggravated by bitter circumstances, and now you will understand why Sorège does not find it a pleasant subject to speak of."



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"I should have been greatly obliged to him had he confessed the truth. I esteem you greatly for having been frank enough to explain to me your weakness. I can well understand the resolve that the sister of this unhappy man has taken. I myself would not pardon one lacking in moral courage. I can understand why one should be seized with fear, face to face with a grizzly or a puma. That is a physical effect which one has no time to reason out. But intellectual faltering, I am sure, would find me pitiless. Since your return, have you made any attempt to see your former fiancée or her mother?"

"No," said Tragomer, in a low voice, "I knew beforehand how useless it would be."

"And you, Count, have you never seen them since?"

"Never."

Miss Harvey remained pensive for a moment. Then a melancholy look, forming a strange contrast with her usual vivacity, came into her eyes.

"The fate of these two poor women is the saddest that could be imagined. Do they persist in believing this poor man innocent?"

"They do."

"And yet they do nothing?"

"What can they do?"

"If I were in their place, I should do something. I can not admit that one should remain quietly in one spot weeping and dreaming, while one is continually thinking of the injustice that has been committed. If one of my brothers, Monsieur de Tragomer, were a victim of some vile machination and had been con-

## THE PLOT THICKENS

demned, I should have known no peace until his innocence had been proclaimed. I should have spent in the effort my strength, my intelligence, and my fortune. But I should not have left him in the bagnio, when I should have felt compelled to carry him off by force, and with the help of a band of buccaneers, if necessary."

Sorège, at these last words, gave a forced laugh, his eyes fixed on Tragomer's face, which he examined with anxiety. Then he said:

"You are a regular amazon, Miss Maud. There you go! Matters are not carried out so easily as you imagine. There are bands of soldiers, strong ramparts, and swift-sailing vessels cruising along the coast to guard the convicts."

"You appear to be delighted that such is the case," interrupted the young girl, with considerable vivacity. "Really, I do not understand you. At times I imagine you cherish a feeling of hatred against your old friend."

"Hatred! Heavens! No. But I blame him severely, notwithstanding all the affection I entertained for him, for having so carelessly compassed his own ruin and troubled his friends. All he had to do was to walk straight along the road lying open before him. Because he liked crooked paths, he plunged into such a slimy sink of vice that it was impossible to prevent his downfall. I feel embittered against him, Miss Maud, but only on that account, believe me. This feeling of bitterness is still friendship, however."

"Well, if you are still attached to him, why do you

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not share Monsieur de Tragomer's conviction? Why do you not try to disprove the culpability of the condemned man?"

"Ah! That is impossible. It would be all in vain," declared Sorège forcibly. "Refute material facts universally recognized, prove the improbable, deny all evidence? That is not the kind of work for a sensible human being. One may bewail, regret, villify. But oppose common sense; combat truth itself? Where is the advantage?"

"He is right, Mademoiselle," said Tragomer coldly. "I understand so well that my convictions are purely Platonic. If there had been anything to do, I would have made the attempt, believe me. It is because everything is useless that I have determined to seek distraction by traveling."

"Since you are starting again, why not go and see this poor man?"

Tragomer shuddered. Once more he wondered whether the American girl was not in collusion with Sorège to make him speak out. But the very audacity of the question was in itself a protest against such a supposition. She was simply carried off by the adventurous spirit of her race, by the ignorance of obstacles common in those who are wealthy, and the complete ignorance of laws and regulations which characterizes womankind.

"Go to Nouméa?" asked Sorège, in a low voice. "Sorry expedition!"

"I should not have sufficient courage," said Tragomer. "It would be too sad a spectacle to see one I had known handsome and fascinating living in a

## THE PLOT THICKENS

state of abject misery. Then how should I find him, after he has spent two years among his debased companions? One's nature deteriorates, one's body becomes worn out, bad habits are acquired; life in a bagnio turns a strong, intelligent man into a being at once degraded and feeble. I would rather not see this; it would be too painful."

"Still, you believe him innocent, and yet you can resign yourself to the thought that he is living under such pitiable conditions? You will make no attempt to take him from them? You are going to sail on the Mediterranean, coasting along and calling at Cannes and Monte Carlo. All this is very healthy and comforting. There you will have no painful sights to view if you can keep your eyes from the consumptive visitors. I have been told that the French were the last worshipers of the chimera and that no heroic folly was ever committed in any part of the world without their taking part in it. I am very pleased to see that practical common sense has come to them, and that they now consult their interest before following their inspiration. A pleasant journey, Monsieur de Tragomer. I am delighted to have made your acquaintance. In all probability you will return from your trip next spring. My father and I will then be going to the Isle of Wight, as we do annually; if you will come to see us there, it may be an agreeable change for you. No fatigue, no emotion, and plenty of comfort."

As she spoke thus she looked at the young man with an affected smile, which gave to her thin face an expression of extraordinary disdain. Tragomer

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appeared completely dejected, while Sorège in a fatherly way came to the rescue:

"Must one be a madman to please you, Miss Maud? It is too bad for you to be quarreling with Tragomer on my account. Why should you exact from him some act of sublime devotion, of which I do not set him the example? Are you in a mood for quarreling this evening? If so I will serve as a target for you, but for pity's sake spare the passersby!"

Miss Harvey burst into a laugh.

"After all, Count, you are right, as your friend said just now, and he, too, is right. I, only, was in the wrong to attack you as I did."

"You are a new people," said Sorège. "That will pass away, as it has done with our decadent race."

The young girl held out her hand to Tragomer, and resuming her good humor said:

"I have gone a little too far! You will pardon me, I hope."

"Willingly," said the Breton, "the more so because it has all been at Sorège's expense."

They laughed, Sorège himself deigning to allow a smile to spread over his usually impassive countenance.

"Well," said the girl, "nothing that may be said or done here to-night will be of any interest to me. I must retire."

She gave a signal to her father and withdrew, followed by Sorège. Immediately, Marenval, who had been watching his companion for some time, drew near, and asked, not without considerable uneasiness:

## THE PLOT THICKENS

"What kind of a conference have you three been having in that corner? I could only just see you, and yet, from your gestures alone, I imagined you must have been engaged in a very serious conversation."

"You were not mistaken. Miss Harvey came very near offering to take me to New Caledonia herself."

"You are joking?"

"Indeed, I am not. This took place in Sorège's presence. I have not yet recovered from the shock!"

"Ah! the daughter takes after the father? The family seem bent on taking their friends to the sea with them!"

"I had to submit to a regular cross-examination on Jacques de Fréneuse."

"Bah! With what object?"

"I should like to know. At one time, I suspected that Sorège had prepared this trap to catch me. But it was not so. He was as uneasy as myself. Perhaps we owe everything to chance. In any case, when the right time comes, I intend to take advantage of the incident. Miss Harvey will not remain indifferent to our efforts in favor of Fréneuse. If it is necessary to ask for her help under positive circumstances, I do not deem her to be a woman who would hesitate to give it."

"Even against her fiancé?"

"Even against him."

"Are you certain they have not divined any of our plans?"

"Absolutely. I preferred to allow myself to be

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made sport of by that lively but odd girl. Just now, she has no flattering opinion of me. I will make her change it, however, in due time."

"You are going?"

"Yes. I have still to complete preparations and some accounts to settle."

"Where shall we meet to-morrow?"

"At the home of Madame de Fréneuse at three o'clock. I must try to see her. I rely upon you to obtain permission to be received by her."

"Good-by till to-morrow, then."

## Chapter XIV

### A SECRET VOYAGE

THE gloomy-looking hotel in the Rue des Petits-Champs appeared to awake from its somber silence when the entrance-bell rang under Tragomer's impatient hand. Old Giraud came to open the door. He smiled at Marenval, and stood there stupefied at the sight of Christian. His countenance, however, resumed its taciturn expression, and the former merchant asked:

"Are Madame and Mademoiselle de Fréneuse at home?"

"Certainly, sir, but I do not know if Monsieur de Tragomer——"

The reproachful accent with which this interrupted sentence was uttered deeply troubled the young man. From his very first step on the threshold he knew exactly in what esteem he was held. There was the old man, who had known him from childhood, who had so often taken him back to his father's home at night, after spending the day playing with Jacques; the old man who had given him lunch in the little room next to the ante-chamber, and took care that nothing should be wanting, either in point of amusement or dainty tit-bits; this



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same old man it was who now, with averted gaze, wondered whether it would be possible to admit him or not. The house was still and lonely, for Jacques was no longer there; the old servant, trembling and sad, now walked with bent back, and he, Tragomer, was returning as a stranger to that house, formerly cordially open to him. He said:

"Do not tell the ladies that I am here, Giraud. I will wait in the ante-room where——" as he said these words, so pregnant with the memories of the past, his eyes filled with tears.

"Ah! Monsieur Christian," exclaimed the servant, quite upset, "our Jacques will no longer be there to keep you company, as formerly. . . . But I see you have not forgotten him. . . . Yes, you still love him! Ah! I thought it would be impossible for you, like all the others, to have abandoned your friend!"

"No! Giraud, I have not abandoned him. Of this you shall have proof. But it is important that I speak to Madame de Fréneuse. Monsieur Marenval is going to ask her to receive me. Go with him; I will wait till you come for me."

He entered the room in which Marenval had questioned Giraud at so great length concerning Monsieur de Sorège. The old servant and Cyprien entered the salon where the poor, disconsolate mother, dressed in mourning, unappeased and hopeless, sat near the fireplace. In the recess of the window her daughter was working in silence. No words other than those concerning the ordinary events of the household were exchanged by the two women. Outside of these commonplace details, they had only

## A SECRET VOYAGE

one thought on which they knew themselves to be so perfectly in accord that they had no further need of words to understand each other. A look was sufficient.

The door opened and Giraud appeared, followed by Marenval. Mademoiselle de Fréneuse's countenance lit up with a smile. Rising, she held out her hand to Cyprien and him to her mother.

"I promised to return shortly, my dear cousins," said the former business man. "Here I am, and with better assurances to give you than last time."

"Have you learned anything favorable to our cause?" asked Madame de Fréneuse excitedly.

"Yes, indeed, very favorable. . . . But, above all else, I can not have attributed to myself alone the merit for what has been done. In this affair I have a skilful, persevering ally to whom the greater part of the results already obtained are due. . . . I mean Monsieur de Tragomer."

A cloud passed over the brow of Marie de Fréneuse. Marenval pretended not to notice it, and continued:

"It is indispensable that you see him. He alone is able to impart the important information of which we are in possession, for it is he who has obtained it by dint of considerable patience and sagacity."

Madame de Fréneuse looked at her daughter to see how she received this request. The young girl gave a sign of protest, her face turned pale—nevertheless she said:

"Receive him, if you wish to. I will retire."

"Can you not be less severe?"

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"I shall never forget, mother, what has happened."

"Still, if he atones for his fault—if he works with us to rehabilitate your brother?"

"I shall need more than empty words of condolence to convince me," said the young girl bitterly.

Ringling the bell, she waited till the old servant appeared, and then said:

"Show Monsieur de Tragomer into this room," and without another word she passed before her mother and left them alone.

"Poor Christian," said Cyprien to Madame de Fréneuse, "when you know what he has already done, and what he is ready to attempt, you will, I hope, plead his cause with Marie. We must not discourage so useful a man. But for him, what would become of us?"

For a moment Tragomer stood undecided on the threshold, looking around for Mademoiselle de Fréneuse. He saw only Jacques's mother, dressed in deep mourning, her hair quite gray. His lips quivered, his eyes moistened, not a sentence could he frame, as with filial respect he bowed the knee before this martyr. Then for a moment they stood there, silent and agitated. Finally, Madame de Fréneuse regained her composure, wiped away her tears, and looking affectionately at the young man, said:

"I thank you for coming back, Christian; you have restored the past to me for a few moments. Come, tell us what you have done to give us hope for the future."

## A SECRET VOYAGE

Tragomer had risen. He stood by the fireplace, and addressing Marenval as well as Jacques's mother, said :

"I have come to the belief, I might almost say the certainty, that the woman for whose murder Jacques has been condemned is alive."

"Léa Pérelli!" exclaimed Madame de Fréneuse in utter astonishment.

"Léa Pérelli. There has been some mysterious personage in this affair, whom I intend to bring to light. To attain this end I shall overcome every obstacle. Our friend, Marenval, will give me substantial help, for he is animated by the same desire, the same ardor as myself. The object of our enterprise is to prove your son's innocence. This is our aim, one we shall endeavor with all our might to achieve."

"In what way?"

"We are starting to-morrow on a long sea voyage. It is generally understood that we are coasting the Mediterranean. Our appearance at the different points we have fixed upon—Nice, Naples, Palermo, Alexandria—gives a false idea of our real purpose. Quietly we shall steal away, pass through the Suez Canal, enter the Indian Ocean under full steam, reach Colombo, and finally come to New Caledonia. There we reach the end of our voyage. I land, see Jacques, and ask him the dreaded questions which are to lighten the gloom so skilfully cast over the realities of the crime."

"You are going to see him?" said the mother, clasping her hands beseechingly. "Oh, take me with you!"

"That is impossible. Your very presence on board

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would be an avowal of our plans. On the contrary, it would be better for you to be seen here at times during our absence, so that it may be well known that you are in Paris."

"Ah, whose interest is it to watch over me and to be afraid of you?"

"Those who are the accomplices of the guilty man, or the latter himself, in whose place Jacques is suffering. If we awaken their suspicions they may escape. To obtain a hold on them, we shall be obliged to strike like a thunderbolt."

"Do I know them?" asked Madame de Fréneuse, in deep anguish.

"Do not question me," replied Tragomer. "Be contented with the hope I give you. After living for the past two years in grief and sorrow, recover a little confidence and take some pleasure in life."

"Pleasure, alas! Shall I ever get it, even if I do see my son again? Such trials crush one's heart for the rest of one's life. Look, I have become bent, gray-haired, and wrinkled like an octogenarian, and I am not fifty years old. The torture I have suffered has been nameless. I pray heaven that those who have inflicted it on me may not be too heavily punished."

"Oh, Madame! They will be, and terribly, for hitherto everything has succeeded so well with them that they feel sure of escape. An incredible number of circumstances were reviewed before I came across one fact that began to bring light to my mind. During repeated researches much time has been needed, and great efforts made to reach the

## A SECRET VOYAGE

point we have now attained, and nothing is yet done; all the real work has yet to be done."

"Still, you have good hopes of success?" said the mother, already alarmed by Tragomer's cautious statement.

"My dear cousin," said Marenval, "look at me carefully. It is not often I make advances, and that I never do without deliberation. For a man like myself at the end of his career, settled in life, happy, rich, and free to take up an affair like the one on which Christian and I are now engaged, he must necessarily be perfectly sure of the result! Yes, we shall succeed! We shall succeed!"

And as Madame de Fréneuse looked at Cyprien with eyes in which admiration was mingled with astonishment, he added, in simple tones:

"Tragomer has promised me that we shall succeed, and I have confidence in his word."

"But how shall we know what will happen during this long voyage of yours?"

"I have provided for everything," said Marenval. "My valet will receive letters which he will bring to you, and which will keep you well informed. You will receive nothing directly; any act of indiscretion, a single prattling word on the part of a servant might reveal everything, and we shall be forced to proceed with considerable caution."

"And how shall I answer you?"

"By the same channel. My valet, like Giraud, is a man to be trusted. . . . You may give him your letters; he will send them to the address of the captain of our yacht."

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"What I may now ask of you," resumed Madame de Fréneuse, with much emotion, "is to give this poor child a kiss from me, to assure him my heart has never doubted his innocence, and that in my distress I have reckoned my own trouble as nothing when I thought of his. He has committed many faults; he has given his enemies a terrible hold on him by his indiscretions. But he is paying for his erring life by a punishment which exalts and ennobles him. Tell him all that. For if he has wept he must be consoled, and before promising him any kind of rehabilitation, he must be shown that nothing, not even pain and grief, is lost in this world!"

"I will do as you desire," said Tragomer gravely; "but if you imagine that all error must be expiated, will you not deign to be indulgent toward those I have committed? Will you not plead my cause with Mademoiselle de Fréneuse? Before leaving, it would be very sweet to me to bid her good-by. Perhaps, if she remains pitiless, in so far as she is concerned personally, she would, nevertheless, like to encourage me, from affection for her brother. I will ask her for neither pardon nor hope. A simple wish for success, and if, perchance, I do not return, a prayer."

Madame Fréneuse rose from her seat, and opening the door passed into the next room. After a brief interval she reappeared, followed by her daughter. The two women were pale, their eyes filled with tears; Marie, cold and gloomy, advanced toward her former fiancé, and full of self-possession, said:

"You have asked to see me, before leaving France,

## A SECRET VOYAGE

Monsieur de Tragomer. I know you are going to try to rescue my brother. I can not, therefore, refuse; here I am."

He stood before her, troubled, unhappy, even trembling. He would have liked to speak, but he had promised to be silent. An ardent justification of his conduct sprang to his lips; words of protest filled his mind, while his heart was overwhelmed with bitter regret at seeing, after an absence of two years, the one he had known smiling and strong in her youthful ardor, now sad and emaciated by despair. Perhaps she appeared to him even more beautiful in grief than in joy; her countenance had assumed an expression of nobility and pride, which had replaced the former air of thoughtlessness and simplicity. She was now more womanly, and he considered her a thousand times more worthy of being won. He drew near; she stood still with downcast eyes, then he said:

"Marie."

She shuddered; so many happy memories, now effaced and vanished, were evoked by that name pronounced by him. In a moment the whole of the past returned. She saw again the house gay and cheerful, her mother happy, her brother present and beloved by all in spite of his acts of folly, and herself, a fiancée, looking joyfully onward to the future.

At this sweet recollection of her former life, now seemingly ended, she could not restrain her emotions, and raising her hands to her face she burst into tears. Then Tragomer, no longer master of himself, exclaimed in tones of passionate fervor:



## IN DEEP ABYSS

"O Marie! these tears you are now shedding fill me with mingled grief and joy. You have not forgotten everything. Your heart is not barred to me forever. It will receive me again, I feel it, and you will forgive me. I will make such efforts that you will forget your righteous anger, and your severity toward me will fade away. I did not wish to leave without seeing you again. I imagine I should have failed in my attempt had I not received a fresh store of intelligence and resolution from the inspiration of your presence. Now I have no longer any uneasiness. Everything will go well, and we shall triumph; and it will be for your sake that I shall have made such efforts. Perhaps you will grant me your indulgence and, comparing my faults with the reparation I shall some day offer you, you will forgive me wholly."

She stood there, calm and decided; then, turning on Christian, her beautiful face now transfigured with hope, she uttered this single word,

"Succeed!"

Tragomer gave a cry of joy, and, as the hand of Mademoiselle de Fréneuse hung by her side, he bent down, tenderly took those pale, thin fingers and pressed them passionately to his lips. Then, bowing to Madame de Fréneuse, he said:

"Come, Marenval, now we must start!"

"Yes, we will start at once," said Cyprien with energy, and, after affectionately kissing the two ladies, he followed Tragomer.

## PART II



## Chapter I

### A BAGNIO IN NEW CALEDONIA

THE ship's boat came to a stop at the foot of the jetty steps, and a sergeant of the marine infantry seized a gaff and hooked on the ring, so as to facilitate the landing of the passenger. The latter, rising from the stern where he had been seated, said to the helmsman in English:

"Wait till I return; perhaps I shall be away some considerable time. Not a man must leave the boat."

"Very well, sir!"

Tragomer, clothed in white duck, wearing a cork helmet, similar to that worn by colonists, stepped lightly on to the wet steps, and had soon set foot on the jetty. A band of natives in charge of a colonial guard, their hair colored with lime, clothed in filthy rags, crowded in front of the traveler.

The sergeant in authoritative tones ordered them to retire:

"Back! all of you, or take the consequences!" he said.

And, raising a rope's end that he held in his hand, he seemed disposed to enforce his orders.

The natives gave way, and Tragomer found himself alone in the presence of the sergeant.

"You have come from the small English vessel, I suppose?" inquired the sergeant.

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"Yes," said Tragomer, with a strong accent; "I am stepping on shore for a short time. I should like to visit the penitentiary."

"Permission must be obtained from the governor."

"Ah! Where is the governor?"

With the usual French willingness to oblige, the sergeant cast a glance around him, and seeing an attendant native seated, aimlessly, on the parapet of the jetty, said to him:

"Advance to order, Dérinho. Here is a stranger, conduct him to the governor's residence." Then turning to Tragomer he continued, "You will not find him at home, sir; he is on tour on board the state advice-boat. But his secretary will receive you. Yes, it is ten o'clock, he will be there still. If, perchance, he is away, you will find him at the *Café de la Cousine*."

"Thank you," said Tragomer with a smile, and, as he did not wish to offer money to the fine fellow, he drew from his pocket a Manila straw cigar-case and said:

"Take a cigar, will you?"

"With pleasure, sir. Ah! You called at Manila on the way I see."

Christian emptied his cigar-case into the soldier's hand, and after bowing, followed the guide who was awaiting him.

"Well!" exclaimed the sergeant gaily, after Tragomer had gone, "if I catch smoker's cancer this time, it will not be from smoking cigar-butts." And lighting, with great delight, a cigar destined for a prince or a millionaire, he again returned to duty.

## A BAGNIO IN NEW CALEDONIA

The heat was very great; and was only slightly modified by the breeze from the open sea. The island Nou, away on the horizon, stretched out its low-fringed shore, while the verdant peaks of the Isle of Pines shot their wild jagged crests into the cloudless sky. The waters of the bay teemed with life and movement on account of the numerous long-boats and barges passing in and out. A large coal-ing-vessel filling its bunkers spread over the surrounding waters an inky tinge, while merchant vessels, at anchor, with sails furled, and smokeless funnels, lay, as it were, asleep on the blue waves. A few hundred yards away a white yacht, schooner-rigged, was at anchor. Built especially for speed, she lay low in the water and from her yellow funnels faint lines of smoke issued. The English flag was flying from the gaff of the mizzen, abaft; while the continual moving of sailors on the deck, indicated that the vessel was under steam and ready to start at a minute's notice.

Passing along an avenue planted with trees, tho the condition of the road was no credit to the Colonial Administration, Tragomer, preceded by his guide, made his way into the town. In fine weather a thick dust covered the road, which after a shower of rain became transformed into a stream of mud. Stores kept by discharged convicts and offering for sale articles of luxury as well as of utility were visible on every hand. The little native girls with woven hats, and clad in colored cotton cloth, passed on their return from the market, laden with their provision-baskets, and responded with smiles to the glances

## IN DEEP ABYSS

cast at them by the soldiers. The attendant slackened his steps. A tolerably large building, over which the French flag waved, appeared before Tragomer's eyes.

"Governor's residence," said Dérinho with considerable emphasis, as he squirted a jet of saliva reddened by betel.

"Good!" replied Tragomer as he looked at the sentinel, who, shaded by his sentry-box, was mounting guard and leaned indolently on his gun.

After tipping his guide, he entered.

A band of convicts was engaged in repairing the roof of a small building, while the overseer, seated on a wooden log, was smoking a cigarette. Above a door Tragomer read the following inscription:

"Penitentiary Administration.—Governor's Room.—General Secretary's Office." He entered: a clerk was sitting in the room half asleep. On hearing the sound of footsteps, he raised his head and inquired sharply:

"What can I do for you, sir?"

"I wish to speak to the secretary."

"Another Englishman," said the quill-driver, and, rising with considerable effort, he made his way into the adjoining room.

"Come in," said he, on returning a minute later.

The secretary was lying stretched out in an arm-chair, with vest unbuttoned and cravat untied. He rose on seeing the visitor, pointed lazily to an arm-chair in front of his own, and with an expression of astonishment depicted on his face said:

"Whom have I the honor of addressing?"

## A BAGNIO IN NEW CALEDONIA

Tragomer took from his pocket a sealed envelope, and, making a bow, replied:

"Sir Christian Fergusson, of Liverpool; and here is a letter from the Franch consul at Colombo recommending me to the governor's gracious protection."

"You are English, sir," said the secretary, taking the paper with mild indifference. "Yes, in the way of visitors we see none but Englishmen or Americans. The French never come. They do not care for traveling. . . . Besides, why should they come to such a place? A sorry sight, this penitentiary! All the same; every one to his taste!"

Glancing at the letter he continued:

"Ah! you are making an investigation into the different penitentiary systems, as applied in the colonies by the European states, and comparing the results. A thankless task! One must see the convicts in private, as we do, to form an idea of how little material is to be obtained from them for colonization purposes. . . . Filthy brutes, sir, and difficult to manage. They all imagine, when they arrive here, that they are coming to an El Dorado. They have become intoxicated with the words, New Caledonia. There are some who commit murder so that they may be sent to New Caledonia! They see the colony in their dreams, and when the real state of things is presented to them, they soon sing another tune. . . . It is not a planter's or a sybarite's life they lead. Far from it. They imagine they are to spend their time in promenading by the seaside, smoking, like Parisians at holiday time. . . . They lower their pretensions once they have made



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acquaintance with the bagnios, the dormitories in which they sleep, in chains, and the attendants who walk about with revolvers at their girdles. . . . Oh! when they behave well, the Administration treats them in quite a paternal fashion. They are taken into the offices, their hard lot is mitigated, they are made almost happy. . . . But how many deserve such favors? The greater part have only one idea, to escape."

The secretary paused for breath. He was flattered by the attention his auditor paid him, and was about to continue when Tragomer asked the question:

"Are escapes frequent?"

## Chapter II

### TRAGOMER INTERVIEWS THE MARTYR

"PRETTY frequent, but almost always useless. For it to be possible for a convict to escape, a ship must pick him up. There was the escape of Monsieur Rochefort with Olivier Pain, which has remained the type of a well-arranged flight. But to succeed in such an attempt, a great deal of money must be spent, and one must have accomplices in the outside world. An escaped convict generally makes for the bush, and lives there, like a bandit in a Corsican thicket. After a certain time, he is recaptured by the natives or gives himself up of his own accord. His only chance is to obtain possession of a canoe and try to reach Australia. But then he runs the risk of dying of hunger or of being eaten by sharks."

"From which island do they escape most easily?"

"From Nou. The last to give us the slip set off in the attendant's canoe after stripping him of his uniform and tying him up to a tree. But he was captured in the open sea and brought back. He was a former schoolmaster condemned for a criminal outrage. Oh, determined dog he was! He is now enduring five years' solitary confinement. No fear of his catching the sunstroke now!"

## IN DEEP ABYSS

The secretary laughed complaisantly, but, seeing how imperturbably calm his visitor remained, he checked himself.

"And when the escapes succeed, what do you do?"

"We take precautions, in the first place, so that the newspapers say nothing of the matter, and the minister may not be disgraced. Ah, sir, the press! That is the administration's incessant preoccupation."

"Have you at present any convicts of exemplary conduct and deserving of favor, as you said just now?"

"Ah! I see you are making serious investigations," said the secretary, looking at Christian with considerable curiosity.

"Yes. I am to publish an article in *The Century Magazine* on my return to England, and I should like very detailed information."

The secretary took up a register, turned over the leaves, and said:

"We have, in the stores, a former notary who was sent here when twenty years of age, for having ruined a whole town in the provinces. He renders us very important services. Again, in the hospital we have a doctor condemned to penal servitude for life for poisoning his mistress. Quite recently he acted admirably during an epidemic of smallpox. But for the devotion he displayed, I do not know how we should have managed. As for myself, I should not care to be attended by any other than this doctor, in case I fell ill. He has also the practise of the governor's family."

"How curious!" exclaimed Christian. "And how French in character!"

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"Ah, sir!" continued the secretary, "one must not be prejudiced in the presence of danger, and I should prefer to be cured under the care of a convict, than die under the treatment of an honest man."

"Certainly, and have you any others?"

"Yes, I may especially call to your attention the case of a young man of good family in penal servitude for life for the murder of his mistress. He has fallen into a most extraordinary spiritual condition, delighting the chaplain by his piety. If the governor set him at liberty, and the regulations would allow it, he would certainly turn priest. . . . They have been obliged to separate him from his companions, who insulted and ill-treated him cruelly, and would certainly have killed him in the end, under the pretext that he was a mouton. In penitentiary slang a mouton is one who spies on and denounces his companions."

"Ah, I understand, a *mouchard*, an informer!" said Christian.

"Exactly!"

"And what is this strange young man's name?"

"Fréneuse was his name, but now he is known by the number 2317."

Tragomer quivered with emotion. His face turned pale, and he felt a dull pain at the heart. Mastering himself, he asked, with apparently perfect self-control:

"Would it be possible for me to see the notary, the doctor, and this apostle?"

"If you wish it."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"I imagine it might be of service to me."

"Then I will write you out a permit."

"I thank you for your kindness."

The functionary wrote a few words on a sheet of paper and said:

"I am giving the order to have placed at your disposal the cutter belonging to the Administration. That will simplify all formalities for you. The coxswain will act as guide."

"All right."

"Hello! Past eleven o'clock! Have you had any lunch?"

"No. I partook of a light breakfast this morning. If you will permit a traveler, toward whom you have been so complaisant, especially as I am alone in this land of yours, to beg you to lunch with him, it would be an additional mark of your hospitality—so French in its nature—toward him."

"Really, it is myself who ought to do the honors of the place."

"I should be displeased if you did not accept," said Christian with a smile.

"Very well, I accept."

After tying on his cravat and buttoning his waistcoat, he took up his hat and left the office, followed by Tragomer.

About three o'clock on the same day the cutter, driven through the water by six pairs of oars vigorously handled by as many galley-slaves, landed at the Island of Nou, and Christian, preceded by the coxswain, made his way toward the penitentiary. There was a building near the wall surrounding the con-

## TRAGOMER INTERVIEWS THE MARTYR

victs' camp. Over the door were inscribed in red and black letters the words, "Disciplinary Pretorium." It was the tribunal before which unruly convicts were summoned to answer for their foolish pranks. A kind of stage and a few benches filled the room, the walls of which were whitewashed.

"Will you take a seat for a few minutes, sir? I will go and bring No. 2317 to you. Smoke, if you wish, for the air here is not very pleasant to breathe."

Tragomer bowed but made no reply, leaning against the stage from which the director, aided by his assessors, dealt out punishments to those unfortunate beings who already seemed as tho they had reached the very utmost limit of human suffering. His heart was wrung by an unspeakable anguish. He had accomplished the object he had in view, for the doors of the bagnio were opened to him. Another moment and he was to find himself in the presence of him he had come to seek from so far, and who was now living in the grief of resigned despair.

He was acquainted with his moral condition, that the secretary had clearly explained, but in what condition was he from a physical point of view? How had he borne the terrible trial of living among brigands? After two years of captivity in what state would he find the handsome Fréneuse? Would there still be any strength left in that body which had been submitted to tedious work, want of nourishment, and the burning heat of an exhausting climate? Would not grief have undermined and destroyed all his

## IN DEEP ABYSS

powers? Was it a poor, unhappy wretch, half dead from sorrow and suffering, he was about to see before him, and would his rescue not be too late? A step was heard in the silence, and, the door being reopened, the attendant said:

"Come in; this is the visitor who is authorized to see you."

Tragomer had turned his face aside. At the outset, he wished to render it impossible that Jacques should recognize him. He was waiting to see if the attendant would leave him alone with the convict, and was afraid lest a cry, a gesture, a word even, should ruin everything. The attendant came up to him and said:

"Here he is, sir. He is slightly mad, you know; listen to his silly remarks as long as you like; when you are tired, you have only to call me. I will stand by the door."

Tragomer experienced a delicious sensation of relief. It would be possible for him to speak freely to his friend. He was now burning with the desire to turn round and look at him, standing there, a few steps distant, humble and obedient, awaiting orders. Glancing at him sideways, he saw his emaciated outline in the rough linen clothing of the bagnio. A shadow obstructed the light entering through the doorway, the attendant had disappeared. Christian immediately turned round, and placing his finger to his lips, to counsel his friend to be on his guard, he advanced with a smile.

Jacques de Fréneuse made no sign, uttered not a word, a livid glow spread over his thin, close-shaven

## TRAGOMER INTERVIEWS THE MARTYR

face. His eyes dilated with a look of fright, as tho he were gazing upon a ghost. Trembling in every limb, and with clasped hands and stammering lips, he said, in low tones, doubtless afraid that the welcome vision would fade away into thin air:

"Christian! Christian! Is it possible? Christian!" Tears began to flow from those calm, sad eyes along his brown, emaciated cheeks. He stood there, motionless, panting, half dead with anguish and hope. Suddenly he saw his friend come to him, he felt two affectionate hands grasping his own, and he heard a voice say:

"Take care, the jailer might hear us! Then everything would be over. . . . My poor Jacques! What a sad condition I have found you in! Look at me, let me see your eyes. . . . How you must have suffered; you are so emaciated; so dejected!"

He had gently drawn him into the farthest corner of the room. There it was difficult to see them from outside, and impossible to hear them. They sat down on a bench; Tragomer took the poor martyr in his arms, and pressed him to his heart, weeping and laughing at the same time. The latter, ashamed, tried to release himself from his friend's embrace.

"Are you not horrified to see me?" he said bitterly. "Look at my costume, this number, henceforth my only name. You are embracing a convict, Tragomer! You know that I am an assassin!"

"No! I know that you are innocent, and it is to tell you so, to help you to prove this, that I have traversed thousands of miles. Jacques, kiss me, the one who kissed me last was your mother."



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"My mother!" said Jacques, bewildered. "Then you have seen her, she has sent you, and her kiss at the same time! O Christian! this moment redeems much suffering! Heaven has at last taken pity on me! But pay no attention to what I say! What can I tell you, when my whole life is summed up in the word Misfortune? Speak! I am dying to hear you."

"The few moments we have to spend together, my poor Jacques, are precious ones. I came here under an assumed name. They think I am English. In the harbor there is a vessel at anchor; Marenval, determined and ready for any event, is awaiting me at this moment on board."

"Marenval," said Jacques. "Whence comes this unlooked-for zeal on his part?"

"From regret that he did not do enough on your behalf, and from his wish to repair what he now judges an error."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"Listen. At the time you were condemned, you protested your innocence with all the energy you were capable of. No one believed you. Those who loved you most thought you had committed the crime in a moment of madness. But they were unwillingly obliged to give up your defense. The murder was certain, evident, undeniable."

"Yes," said Jacques, "but it was not I who had committed it. In prison, before the trial took place, I pressed my head between my hands, for I felt, indeed, that I was going mad, the evidence and the certainty that a murder had been committed over-

## TRAGOMER INTERVIEWS THE MARTYR

whelmed me. All the same, I knew I was innocent. In the assize court before the jury, when the witnesses filed out before me, all testifying to my crime, when the Attorney-General spoke in accusation, I wondered if my reason had forsaken me. For they all said things I could neither deny nor refute, and yet I knew I was innocent. During my advocate's remarkable pleading, I felt that none of the arguments he advanced, tho so skilfully presented—for he was a very talented man—would carry conviction with them, and I was by no means astonished to find myself condemned. And yet I was innocent! How comes it, Christian, that such iniquity can exist, that an unhappy man should be given up to torture when he has done nothing to deserve such treatment? How comes it that he should be insulted, disgraced, and bound in chains, if there is not in his destiny a revenge from that Heaven toward which he has been ungrateful? Nothing happens in life without some determining reason, and happiness or misery is merited according as one strives toward goodness or gives oneself up to evil. I was born under a lucky star. Fortune had lavished her most precious favors all around me. I have neglected, rejected, ruined everything. Instead of making use of powerful influences to advance toward the higher life, I have done all I could by their means to sink into the mire. Social rank, wealth, intelligence, physical advantages, all these I have made instruments of idleness, dissipation, and debauchery. Those dearest to me have been heart-broken by my caprices, my mistakes, and my excesses. The only

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way in which I can understand this catastrophe which has put an end to my evil life is an expiation of that very existence itself. Now, after long meditation and much suffering, I have bowed beneath the hand which has struck me, and I hope resignation in this trial of mine will make me deserving of pity and pardon."

"But have you abandoned all hope of justification?"

"How can I prove, at this present moment, what I was unable to prove two years ago? Mysterious circumstances have combined to ruin me. I had a debt to settle against destiny itself; I am paying it."

"Suppose I have brought to light the skilful, nay the criminal, arrangement of the mysterious circumstances?"

"You, Tragomer! Is it possible that you know that which I have almost gone mad seeking to discover, without the slightest success?"

"I do know."

"How did you find it out?"

"By chance."

"Then you know the culprit?"

"Not yet, but I know that it can not be yourself."

"You have found the real murderer of Léa Pérelli?"

"No, I have not found the real murderer of Léa Pérelli, for the very simple reason that Léa Pérelli is alive."

Jacques eyes became fixed and set as tho fascinated by a frightful vision in the distance. With a shake of the head, he said:

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"I saw her, stretched out in her own blood. She was dead!"

"And I saw her in full strength and health. She was alive!"

A look of terror passed over Jacques's face. It seemed to him that he was going mad. Lowering his voice, he said in tones of fear:

"Christian, are you sure you are not raving? At times a kind of doubt returns, making me believe that my reason is impaired. Witnesses, judges, everybody were agreed. I am here, in this livery of disgrace. Look at my clean-shaven face, my closely cropped hair. I am a convict, and that because Léa Pérelli is dead. What would be the meaning of all this display of sternness, this excess of infamy, if I had not had to answer for a crime really committed? How can this formidable and monstrous mystification be explained? And what must be said of those who have lent themselves to its influence?"

He gave a hollow laugh, then tears came into his eyes; he bowed his head to conceal them, and his trembling lips made Christian imagine that he was praying.

"Jacques, I can not explain how it has all happened," replied Tragomer. "I simply assure you that such is the case. An error has been committed. I will not qualify my statement—words would be inadequate to express the horror I feel—still it has been committed. The innocence you proclaimed to your judges, and which they would not admit, is now assured. If a crime has been committed it is not your act. I have assured your mother and sister

## IN DEEP ABYSS

of this, and have succeeded, for a time at any rate, in appeasing their grief and despair. I have declared it to one of the magistrates who studied your case, and found it indefensible, and have stupefied him by my affirmations. I have proved to Marenval that you were innocent. This skeptic—this egoist—has become imbued with such enthusiasm that he has chartered a ship, abandoned his life of pleasure, crossed oceans, and endured fatigue, dangers, and responsibilities of every kind to accompany me. And now that I am here, assuring you that this crime for which you have been condemned has not been committed, will you be the only one who will not believe me?"

"But a crime has been committed!" exclaimed Jacques in bewilderment. "I can still see the dead woman, with her fair hair, her face bleeding and shapeless——"

"Shapeless!"

"Who was that woman if not Léa?"

"That is what I have come to ask you to tell me."

The convict wrung his hands, overwhelmed by the anguish of an ignorance he felt to be mortal.

"I do not, can not know. How can you expect me? Oh, you torture me beyond endurance! Leave me alone in my dejection and misery. What are you seeking? What is the current you are trying to row against? It is all over, quite beyond recall. One can not change one's destiny. I am a wretched victim of an inexplicable fatality. You will not be able to tear me away from my fate. No one—nothing can do this! Do not drive me crazy with

## TRAGOMER INTERVIEWS THE MARTYR

hopes that can never be realized. Your ideas are mad, you are mistaken. Leave me. I no longer hope for anything but death, which will bring me rest and the oblivion of all my troubles."

"Have you abandoned hope to such an extent?" exclaimed Tragomer. "What! has the effect of the wretched condition in which you have been living for the past two years been so complete that you abandon all idea of justifying yourself and bringing down punishment on those who are guilty?"

"You do not know, Christian, what kind of a life I am passing here, and what mortal torture I have suffered. I have become indifferent to everything!"

"Even the hope of seeing your mother and sister again!"

"Oh, no! Everything but that! I want nothing more! But how could you give me this happiness? I am a convict, and, however benevolent people might be toward me, I can not hope to be liberated till years and years have elapsed. Besides, I should never be able to return to France; my mother and sister would be obliged to come here. The reason they have not come with you on this occasion is that they have recognized how impossible it was. They would never do it now. We shall die without ever seeing one another again. That is what is breaking my heart, Christian. I can put up with my wretched lot, I can resign myself to suffering, but I can never console myself for having brought pain and grief on those I love."

His head sank almost to his knees, and, with his

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emaciated body bent in two, enveloped in a coarse linen garb, he wept and groaned like a child. The attendant, on hearing this sound, drew near the door, and, seeing Tragomer seated near the poor fellow, addressed him.

## Chapter III

### A DARING PLAN OF ESCAPE

"Ah! he is telling you his history, and that affects him," said the attendant. "He is not at all bad, altho it was a terrible crime which brought him here. . . . If all the rest were like him our work would be considerably lessened. . . . We could afford, under such conditions, to be humane. . . . But the majority are rascals, who would kill one, sir, unless one had a revolver at his girdle. . . . Have you finished your interview with him, sir? In that case I can take him back to his room."

"In a moment," said Tragomer calmly. "He has moved me greatly by his recital, and I should like to hear the end of his adventure."

"As you please."

And the attendant, lighting a cigarette, returned to his seat in the shade, where he patiently awaited Tragomer.

"You see, Jacques, that our time is limited," resumed Tragomer. "I shall soon have to leave you And yet I have told you nothing of our plans. If you wait here till a ray of truth burst forth, and your innocence is proved, whole years may elapse. Your mother may die without seeing you again. You



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yourself may not live long under such conditions as the present. Besides, it is impossible for us to determine who is really responsible—to unravel the network of the proofs entangled all around you—unless you are by our side, working, guiding, and supplying us with necessary information. The work undertaken will be slow—justice slower still. We must act at once and anticipate justice.”

“Then what plan have you been meditating?” asked Jacques stupefied.

“A plan of escape.”

“For me?”

“Yes. . . . This must be possible. I am assured that you are left in comparative liberty. You work and sleep in a building close to the offices. . . . What time at night are you alone?”

“I will tell you nothing,” said Jacques harshly. “It is vain for you to tempt me; I will not run away.”

“You refuse your liberty?”

“I will not take it.”

“Do you think it will be given you?”

“If you have the proofs of my innocence, seek the revision of my trial.”

“What! Do you not understand that we should have to face all the difficulties your enemies would heap upon us, that it would be necessary to oppose a complete lack of acquiescence in the revision on the part of the entire judicial management. . . . Begin by escaping. Afterward we will prove that you were not guilty—that I can promise you on my word of honor.”

## A DARING PLAN OF ESCAPE

Jacques raised his head. In all his friend had just said two words especially had claimed his attention: your enemies. Until then, he had accused fate for his misfortune. This impenetrable obscurity in which his thoughts were shrouded had helped to appease him. After having been exasperated against the mysterious element in his lot, he had come to consider it as a cause for resignation. Now Tragomer had cast into his mind an unexpected leaven. The dejected calm, which had thrown a languid spell over him, was troubled for a moment, as tho by a sudden fermentation. His enemies! He would like to know who they were—and a burning curiosity had now replaced his careless indifference.

"Do you think my ruin was prepared by those whose wish it was to injure me?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Do you know who they are?"

"I have my suspicions."

"Name them."

In his friend's eyes Tragomer had seen the light of intelligence revive. He recognized the look. It was no longer the depressed and indifferent convict he had before him. Jacques de Fréneuse had reappeared.

"If I name the one who has carried through the whole intrigue, beyond all doubt you will shudder with horror, so base and cowardly has his action been. It would be impossible to be betrayed by one on whom you had a greater right to rely, who knew all your thoughts and actions, who was

## IN DEEP ABYSS

more certainly capable of ruining you because you had entire confidence in him. . . . Imagine another—myself. Suppose you had been betrayed by a second Christian. Question your heart, Jacques, and you will find the one I mean.”

The wretched man’s expression became terrible to behold. He opened wide his eyes, as tho a frightful spectacle were being unfolded before him; his lips trembled, he raised his hands to heaven, and with a cry of despair shouted out the name:

“Sorège!”

Tragomer smiled.

“Ah, you have not hesitated! It could be none other. Yés, Sorège, the discreet and cunning Sorège, who has betrayed, sold, and dishonored his friend!”

“For what reason?” exclaimed Jacques, in a furious protest of dismay. “Why did he do it?”

“Ah! that is what we shall ask Sorège himself; and you may be sure he will confess to us once we have him in our hands. I have already seen how pale and startled he looked when he discovered that I had suspicions of his infamy. Had I not feared to unfold to him our plans, I could have confounded him, as I had the means of doing so. But in that case he would have escaped and I could not have rescued you. On the contrary, I reassured him—threw him on a false scent—in order to obtain freedom of action. If once Sorège had been thoroughly aroused, the proofs would have disappeared and everything would have been lost. Do you now understand, Jacques, that you must escape without

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delay? The opportunity is a unique one. To-morrow, if you will risk the peril, we may be on the open sea, and that would mean for you liberty and restoration to your rights."

"You are driving me mad!" cried the condemned man. "All these fresh thoughts come striking my poor brain—tired and benumbed as it is—within such a short interval. I have lost the habit of exercising my will power. I am nothing more than a poor enslaved beast. What am I to do? Abandon in a single day all the pledges of resignation and of prudence I have given? . . . Expose myself, if recaptured, to pass for a hypocrite and a liar! Tragomer, I can not do it! . . . Leave me to my fate!"

"Jacques, if you will not come with me of your own free will, I will forcibly carry you off," said Christian with terrible energy. "I am ready for anything. I have sworn to your sister that I would restore you to her affection. You understand—to Marie de Fréneuse, whom I love, but who will be mine only on condition I rescue you. It is not for you alone I am making this attempt; it is also for myself. I know what I want and what I must do to obtain it. If you force me to extremes, I will return at the head of my men and carry you off by main force. In the scuffle I shall risk my life and theirs at the same time. But I will pay them well, and they will not hesitate. . . . It is for you to decide."

"Well, I will obey you," said Jacques, suddenly making up his mind. "So much misfortune shall be avoided if I can prevent it by exposing myself

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alone to danger. But even thus, what risks must be run! Leaving here is nothing. . . . I only need a costume to prevent myself being recognized outside the camp."

"We will decide upon a spot where I will bring you a suit exactly like those worn by our sailors."

"I shall have to reach the beach and wait till night comes, then a small boat will come and pick me up."

"I will remain with you. . . . I must not leave you."

"But the boat will not be allowed to land, on account of the strict supervision. It will have to cruise about in the open, and we shall be compelled to reach it by swimming. . . . Shall I have sufficient strength?"

"I will support you—bear you up—if necessary."

"And the sharks?" said Jacques. "Do you not know that they abound in these waters, and that there are a hundred chances to one against our escaping them? They are the best custodians of the island—that fact the administration knows quite well. There is scarcely any watch kept on the sea, so dangerous is all escape in that way."

"We will put this confidence to our profit. . . . As for the sharks, we will run the risk. Five hundred yards' swimming, less perhaps. . . . Besides, we shall be armed. . . . The steam pinnace will come to our aid without any delay."

"Very well! To-morrow, then. Go now. We must not give rise to suspicions, as now my resolution is fixed. . . . We must separate."

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Tragomer grasped the poor convict in his arms, and was assured by the vigor of his friend's embrace that Jacques would not break his engagement.

"I am going now, my good fellow; you may take your prisoner back to his room."

On the threshold Christian exchanged a few words with the keeper.

"You are interested in him, sir," the keeper said. "He is a very good fellow, and quite harmless. . . . He is allowed considerable freedom. No danger of his misconducting himself. . . . If his door were left open, he would not wish to escape. Come, No. 2317, return to your hut, alone. . . . I will accompany you myself, sir."

Jacques bowed his head to conceal the excitement manifest in his countenance. He stammered out as he passed Tragomer:

"Good-by, sir; do not forget that you have promised me a few books."

"I will not forget; good-by!"

The convict disappeared. Christian followed him with impassive look.

"He is slightly crazy," he said to the attendant.

"But I believe, as you do, that he is quite harmless."

"A mere child, sir."

"Where does he live?"

"I will show you the very spot. It is near the chaplain's house, in a building used as a storeroom for ropes. The smell of hemp is healthy. He is very comfortable there, and, besides, he can talk to the chaplain. Oh! that is a great comfort to him,

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as it appears he has ideas of his own on things in general. Yes, a little crazy, as you said, sir. . . . Here is his lodging."

Tragomer halted.

"Good! I will call and visit him to-morrow, when I intend to return to see the doctor and the notary."

"Ah! The Montyons?" exclaimed the soldier, with a smile. "Good, very good!"

And as Tragomer looked at him in astonishment he replied:

"We call them Montyons because here they might compete for the prize of virtue. A mere jest, sir; they are very honest fellows, after all."

"Let us go back to Nouméa," said Tragomer.

"To-morrow, about the same hour, I will return. Shall I require a fresh permit?"

"Yes, that is indispensable. Although you are now well known."

"And you will accompany me?"

"It is my duty to do so."

They had reached the quay, where the rowers in full blaze of the sun lay sleeping, stretched out on the seats of the cutter, rocked gently by the slight swell of the sea, which died away at the steps of the gangway. The attendant gave a shrill whistle, whereon the galley-slaves, roused from their slumbers, sprang to their feet, their pale faces looking troubled and anxious.

"Jump in, sir! Now then, all together!"

The boat's bows shot through the surf of the bay, and Tragomer, abandoning himself to his thoughts,

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rocked gently with the boat as with rhythmic motion the oars struck the water.

An hour later he lightly scaled the steps leading to the yacht and leaped on deck.

Marenval, disguised beyond recognition in his white flannel costume, wearing a sailor's cap ornamented with gold lace, his face tanned by continued exposure to the open air, and his beard all shaggy and untrimmed, advanced eagerly to meet his friend, and leading him to a retired spot beneath a canvas awning which protected the deck from the sun's rays, asked him eagerly:

"Well? Have you seen him?"

"I have just left him."

"Have you settled everything?"

"Not without considerable difficulty."

"What are you telling me?"

"The sad truth. I was almost forced to use threats to induce him to escape."

Marenval made a gesture of astonishment.

"Have we come too late? Has he not sufficient energy or strength to effect an escape?"

"Yes, he has the strength; he was lacking in will power."

"He preferred to stay behind?"

"Yes, he is under the influence of certain ideas of resignation held only by fatalists. He was horrified at the thought of a struggle for freedom. Mere action terrified him. At one time I thought his mind was deranged. . . . This terrible life he has led here is calculated to crush the strongest will. The more refined and sensitive one's soul the more



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rapidly its power vanishes once submitted to such trials. I was obliged to reveal Sorège's treason to restore him to his right mind. On hearing of that, however, he leaped with rage and despair. . . . Then I had him!"

"What decision have you come to?"

"The simplest plan will be the best. To-morrow I will take him a pea-jacket, a Tam-o'-shanter, and a pair of sailor's trousers. I will stay on land all night, under pretext of visiting the interior of the island the following morning, and will help Jacques to reach some part of the coast where, in the clefts among the rocks, we shall be able to hide till nightfall. Then you, in the steam pinnace, will cruise along the coast of the island, keeping close inland when darkness sets in, and the rest is only the matter of a few minutes. We shall put to sea and try to reach the boat. If I shout put on all speed, for this will be a signal that we are in danger. In a few minutes everything will be settled—our safety or our ruin."

"And the vessel?"

"To-morrow we will ask for her clearance papers so that she will be ready to sail at seven o'clock in the evening. We must meet her steaming by the island Nou and ready to turn on full steam.

"We may be pursued, for there is a steamer in the roadstead. And if the alarm is raised, we must provide against every eventuality; we shall be chased immediately, and——"

"There is nothing to fear; our yacht is built for speed."

"Suppose we are fired on?"

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Marenval made no reply. His eyes strayed to the four guns, whose copper muzzles projected from the side.

"We have the wherewithal to defend ourselves, have we not? That is what you are thinking," said Tragomer.

"Yes," said Marenval, "but in that case we should be regular buccaneers. And the law would not look on the matter as a jest. Therefore, we must try to avoid a fight."

"Still, suppose it is inevitable?"

"Will the captain and crew obey orders?"

"The captain is an Englishman. He will not allow himself to be captured. His crew is under perfect discipline; they will execute any order given."

Marenval sighed. He had foreseen the difficulties and the danger. The moment had come to meet them, so he boldly took his stand.

"We will overcome all difficulties," he said. "Up to the present everything we have done has succeeded. We have had splendid weather all the time. Our yacht is capable of eighteen knots an hour for twelve hours without slackening speed. The result will depend on the speed with which we can come to your help to-morrow night. Minutes then will be more important than hours later on. If you rely on me, everything will take place for the best. I shall not leave the bridge. And, upon my word of honor, if everything must be risked to come to your help. . . . Well! We will risk everything!"

Night was rapidly approaching. Through the transparent haze extending over the sea the lights of

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the island of Nou gleamed one by one in the darkness, and the outlines of the penitentiary camps and shops might be seen in the distance under the glare of the beacon-lights. On that silent roadstead, in the midst of that obscurity which had fallen with such sudden rapidity, this picture of the bagnio, thus revealed by the lights which helped to keep watch over these wretched inhabitants, cast a veil of sadness over the minds of the two friends. What passions of regret and grief lay fermenting in this abode of crime and shame! Under the limpid starry sky a cry of hatred and vengeance arose on the evening air. And in that peace and warmth, amid the calm serenity of nature, human beings—veritably tamed—lay there cursing their hopeless lot, a life of suffering and misery.

The attendant who had accompanied Tragomer pointed to the rope-yard, saying:

"Here is the place, sir. If you would like to enter, I will summon the prisoner."

Christian turned round to the sailor who accompanied him and said in English:

"Come in with me, Dougall."

The man, who was carrying a small wooden box on his shoulder, touched his cap with his hand, and advanced as though he would enter the room, when the sentry stopped him and said:

"You must leave your box outside. It is against the regulations to carry anything into the building without a permit."

"Here it is," said the attendant, taking a paper from his pocket.

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The sailor followed Tragomer into the hut where, seated on the floor, and leaning against the wall, a number of convicts, with chains fastened to the waist, were picking oakum. They raised their heads to look at the visitor, while their hands, aching with the rough work, remained motionless. A dull growl arose from these human cattle. On seeing the keeper, however, as he closed the door, they were awed into silence. The three men crossed a small yard adjoining the disciplinary-ground, where through the railing Tragomer's eyes were attracted by a harrowing sight. There, an unhappy wretch, his head covered with a kind of monk's cowl, through the holes of which a pair of eyes savagely gleamed, was moving up and down the courtyard like a wild beast in its cage. His walk was slow, while the chain to which he was bound clanged harshly at his every step. Awful was the sight of this solitary masked individual, gloomily dragging his chain under the burning blaze of the midday sun.

"What is that man doing there?" asked Tragomer of the attendant.

"He is taking half an hour's exercise. Afterward he will return to his dungeon. He tried to escape, but was caught, and is now paying the penalty of two years' solitary confinement. He sees and speaks to no one, and lives in a cell three yards long and one yard wide."

"A veritable black hole!" exclaimed Tragomer, horrified. "So this is the fate that awaits the wretched beings who try to escape from here."

"Ah, sir! If they were not dealt with rather

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harshly, there would be no means of keeping the upper hand."

"Still, it is very natural for a convict to wish to escape."

"True, but it gives us a great deal of anxiety. Therefore, no leniency is shown toward those who attempt it, and are recaptured."

The solitary convict, veiled in his cowl, continued his weary walk. Christian shuddered at the thought that if Jacques, once free, were again to fall into the hands of his keepers a similar fate would befall him. Instinctively he sought for the revolver he had placed in his pocket before starting. Death appeared preferable in his eyes to the punishment meted out to this immured convict, who never left his stone cage, except to take exercise, head covered with cowl, so that neither the rays of the sun nor the open air of the sky ever touched his face.

They passed in front of a forge where convicts were molding on an anvil the manacles and chains which were to be used as fetters for their companions in misfortune. Tragomer and the keeper approached a door over which appeared the inscription: "Annex Store-Office."

"Here we are," said the attendant.

Jacques de Fréneuse was seated there in a small room containing a table and two benches, engaged in copying into a register a mass of notes that lay before him. Raising his head, he blushed as he saw his friend enter. Nevertheless he stayed in his place, pen in hand, awaiting the attendant's order.

"You may stop your work while Monsieur is here.

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"These are some books he has been authorized to bring you."

The sailor opened the box, took from it a Bible, a book of travel, and some packets of tobacco.

"I hope you will accept these few cigars," said Tragomer to the keeper, "you will not find the like in these parts. As for the tobacco, I beg of you to leave it for this poor convict."

"Thank the gentleman, 2137. Here you will have enough to last you several months, if you can keep it from being stolen by the rest. Come! You are very lucky. All the visitors are not so generous."

"Thank you, sir," said the convict humbly.

"When you wish to return, sir, I will await for you with the boat. But meantime, I must go and speak to the commandant, who lives at the far end of the penitentiary. I shall be with him for an hour."

"Take your time. I will not return till the time limit expires."

"Six o'clock. It will be dark."

"Take the sailor with you. Do not change any of our arrangements, Dougall."

The sailor gave a salute and left the room, preceded by the keeper. Tragomer stood on the threshold watching to make certain that the road they were taking was different from the one by which they had come. They would consequently not be obliged to pass the sentry again. Luck was evidently in favor of Jacques. Closing the door, Christian clasped his friend to his breast, and giving him

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a look which seemed to search his very soul, he said:

"Still determined?"

"Resigned to follow you since you wish it. Resolved to suffer, since suffering must come."

"Good! We have only a few moments to ourselves. For two hours I have been lounging about the penitentiary to kill time, listening to the senseless talk of an idiot who was formerly a notary and the wailing of an insane paralytic who used to be a doctor. My poor friend, ten years of this hellish existence would have reduced you to a similar condition. Better meet death in an attempt for freedom."

All the time Tragomer was speaking he was rapidly undressing himself. Under his white vest was a pea-jacket of blue cloth similar to the one worn by the sailor Dougall, and under his trousers another pair of the same goods as the pea-jacket. From his pockets he took out a red-bordered Tam-o'-shanter and a pair of shoes.

"Come, quick, undress! Do we run no risk of being surprised?"

"No; no one will come if the keeper has really gone. But how shall I take off my chains?"

"Wait a moment!"

From his side pocket Tragomer took out a hammer and a small steel saw mounted on a bow, similar to those used for fretwork. He could not refrain from a smile as he exclaimed:

"Burglar's instruments."

Already he was dexterously working the saw, and like dust the filings fell without the rasping of the

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saw on the iron being heard by any but themselves. After sawing away for a quarter of an hour, the ring on the arm was cut half through. Then Tragomer gave the manacle a sharp blow with the hammer and broke it off. To free the bound man's leg was the next task, and this was accomplished more quickly. The chain fell to the floor, and with a sigh of relief Jacques stretched his limbs free at last from the infamous bond. Tragomer picked up the chain, rolled it up, and was preparing to conceal it when Jacques said:

"Take off those two rings, I wish to take them with me."

Again striking freely on the chain, this time without any fear of injuring the prisoner, Tragomer severed the two manacles and placed the odious bracelets in his pocket, as Jacques, throwing off his squalid prison clothes, put on those that his friend had brought him. Dressed in uniform and with shoes on his feet, Jacques's appearance was very different from that in his convict dress. He seemed taller, broader-shouldered, and no longer bent beneath a load of infamy and despair. His pallid, hairless face alone might still attract attention and betray him. Tragomer took out his pocket-book, from which he drew a small case full of crayons. He made Jacques sit down, and, as though preparing him for a fancy ball, gave his face and forehead a reddish hue. Then, with the utmost care, he fastened to his chin a reddish beard. At last, satisfied with his work, he handed Jacques a small round mirror, saying:



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"Look! Do you recognize yourself?"

Jacques looked in the mirror and saw the reflection of a vigorous sailor, bronzed by a tropical sun, and no longer the wretched, discouraged countenance of poor 2317. Tragomer, handing him a revolver, said, with a resolute air:

"Now, take this pistol. It is understood that you must not be recaptured alive! If necessary, I will defend you with my last breath."

"Do not be alarmed," said Jacques, with a smile. "The last shot shall be for me."

"Well, take this box on your shoulder, carry it as Dougall did, and let us start."

Jacques then turned to Tragomer, and, before crossing the threshold of that miserable hut in which he had suffered so much, flung himself into his friend's arms with the exclamation:

"Thanks, Christian, thanks, whatever may happen."

"Come," said Tragomer, "keep cool, and now let us go forward."

They crossed the yard, where the small forge was, entered the rope-yard, in which the convicts continued their work, lacerating their fingers as they picked the rough strands of oakum, and reached the entrance to the building where the sentry stood. Leaning against his sentry-box and supported by his rifle, the soldier, protected from the glancing rays of the sun, appeared as though he had not stirred an inch. He glanced carelessly at the two men, recognized the foreign visitor and the sailor bearing the box, and did not move a muscle. Tragomer, pale

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with emotion and with beating heart, raised his hand to his helmet and said as he passed:

"Good night."

"Good night," the sentry replied.

Jacques was now in the street, but not yet out of the penitentiary. The enclosure had still to be passed. But Christian had no longer any apprehension, for in his pocket he carried a permit under his name and that of Dougall. Encouraged by his first success, he was prepared to cope with the attendant to force a passage if necessary. A feeling of exaltation, the result of the emotions he had just passed through, came over him. He felt he possessed the strength of ten men, and was now sure of final success. On reaching the railing they chanced to fall upon a body of convicts filing off on their return to camp. The keeper was busy counting his boarders, and was swearing like a Turk at two convicts who had just upset a small cask of liquid resin, the smell of which infected the whole surrounding atmosphere.

"Ah! d—— the slovens! They have done it on purpose!" shouted the keeper. "A week's solitary confinement and dry bread! Who is to clear away this dirty mess? Not I, for certain. Corporal, keep these fools here till everything is cleaned up. If they can not remove it with their hands, let them lick it up with their tongues."

He saw Tragomer and his sailor approaching to pass out.

"Ah! Here are the English now," he growled. "Good! Pass! We have no time to talk."

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He continued bullying the convicts about their clumsiness. Tragomer and Jacques were now outside.

"Two points to the good," said Christian, in a burst of gaiety. "We have only three chances against us now. We must reach the shore and hide, and then wait for the small boat that is to take us to the yacht. To the right."

They turned their backs on the quay and made their way toward the sea. Natives, freedmen, and soldiers looked inquisitively at them as they passed. On turning round a shed Jacques flung down his box and, quite untrammelled, walked by Christian's side. They passed behind a cluster of tamarisk growing in the sand and found themselves alone at last. As far as the eye could reach stretched the bush, which came to within a hundred yards of the girdle of coral reefs on which the waves broke. These banks were covered with submarine vegetation, which gave them a verdant tinge and cast on the surrounding sea a greenish hue.

"Look!" said Tragomer, pointing to the liquid expanse, a blue waste of waters. "The yacht!"

As had been agreed upon the previous night the ship was cruising about a mile off land, while the black smoke poured from her funnels into the clear sky. Her white hull, strait-sheered, was distinctly outlined in the light of the setting sun. The slightest details could be distinguished, and Christian imagined he could see two men on the bridge.

"One of them must be Marenval."

"Come along," said Tragomer. "In an hour the

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sun will set, and we must conceal ourselves. The guard will wait in vain for me by his boat, then he will commence a search, and your escape will be discovered. That will be the moment when the real danger will begin."

They were alone on the sand among the mastic-trees and the jujube vegetation. Behind in the distance the somber outline of the penitentiary could be seen. The yacht, with rhythmic motion, maneuvered out to sea. Suddenly a puff of white smoke shot from the side of the ship, and a second later a faint report reached the ears of the fugitives.

"They have seen us," said Tragomer. "That is a rifle-shot to attract our attention. Doubtless they are keeping a lookout by telescope, though they are not certain who we are. Let us give a reply!"

Breaking off a branch from a tree, Tragomer took a long white scarf from his pocket and fastened it to the end, thus making a flag. Then he waved it thrice through the clear air. A second puff of smoke followed the first, and the succeeding report gave the two friends the assurance that their signal had been understood. Encouraged by the knowledge that they were in communication with the yacht, they picked their way along the reefs with greater speed, shifting farther and farther from the danger zone, and placed the greatest possible amount of space between themselves and any chance of pursuit.

They were now among the rocks. A tongue of coral jutted out into the sea, forming a kind of low headland, which was battered on every side by the breaking sea. This strip, which stretched out more

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than half a mile into the water, almost resembled a sleeping serpent. They made for the strip, which was not more than two hundred yards wide. It was covered entirely with sand, and ended in a knoll of rocks. Toward this rising ground, forming as it did a kind of shelter, Christian and Jacques directed their steps. Suddenly they started with alarm, a cannon-shot pealed, then a second, and a third, fired at regular intervals. At the same time the balmy breezes brought to their ears sounds of rolling drums and the confused murmur of hundreds of voices in the distance. They looked at one another with blanched faces.

"Everything is discovered!" said Jacques.

"They are at our heels!" added Tragomer.

He cast a glance around. Like a globe of fire the sun lit up the waves into which it was about to sink. Another hour, perhaps, and the night, suddenly descending, would have cast its welcome shadows over their flight. But not before an hour; and already the natives must be scouring the sandy plains hunting for the fugitives' track.

"Let us try to reach the edge of the strip and hide in the rocks," said Christian.

They advanced with rapid steps, and, reaching a small grotto, they found themselves free for a few moments to regain their breath and survey the outlook.

"See!" said Tragomer. "The yacht is tacking and sending off the pinnacle at the same time. They have guessed that we are in danger and are coming to our aid."

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The steam-pinnacle was quickly manned, and shot rapidly through the waves. The distance separating it from the land visibly lessened. Already Tragomer's keen eye picked out Marenval seated in the bows. But the bold attempt thus made to effect their rescue suddenly exposed them to a mortal danger. A squad of police beating the bush had noticed the pinnacle, and suspecting that some connection existed between the convict's flight and the progress of this vessel toward the coast, set to shouting and, forming a semicircle, advanced threateningly in the direction of the rocks where the fugitives were in hiding.

Tragomer cast a rapid glance around. He saw before him the boat out at sea, Jacques's only hope of safety, and behind the rocks an armed guard prepared to risk everything if only they could recapture the escaped convict. A thousand yards at least divided the coral ledge and the boat. Five hundred yards separated the pursuers from their prey. Unhesitatingly he threw off his peajacket and shirt, took off his shoes, and retaining only his trousers, in the girdle of which he passed a stout cutlass, he turned to Jacques, who had followed his example, and said:

"We run the risk of being captured if we stay here, and of being killed if we flee. We can not hesitate. Besides, our minds are made up. To the sea, Jacques, and freedom, if it please God!"

After a final embrace, they silently slid into the water and swam toward the open sea. For two hundred yards, hidden from sight by the belt of rocks, their escape was not noticed by the police.

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However, a loud shout soon warned them that they had been seen. A volley of rifle shots was fired at them; the balls, whistling past their ears, proved to them that extreme measures would be resorted to by their pursuers to prevent their escape.

"Dive," said Tragomer. "They are firing again."

But the expected volley did not come. A boat, in command of one of the guards and manned by a dozen native oarsmen, had shot out from the shore, and was now between the fugitives and those firing on them. At the same time, the steam-pinnace from the yacht took all risk, and bore down in the direction of the swimmers. For some minutes a silent but keen struggle took place between these two men striving for liberty and life and those whose energies were now centered in endeavoring to deprive them of one or the other. In the silence the guard's voice was heard furiously shouting to those in charge of the pinnace:

"Haul off! In the name of the law, halt!"

But another voice, Marenval's, replied defiantly:

"Forward, all!"

The two boats were not fifty yards apart, and the swimmers between them were as near being seized by their pursuers as saved by their rescuers.

"Halt!" again yelled the guard, "or I will sink you!"

"On! on!" replied Marenval, standing up in the bow, as tho to give additional authority to the order.

"Go ahead!" shouted the helmsman.

The guard raised his revolver and aimed toward

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the pinnacle. A report followed, and Marenval's white cap, carried off by the ball, fell into the sea. At the same moment a terrible crash was heard. The steam-pinnacle had dashed at full speed into the boat and completely stove her in. A cry of fear rent the air, then a sudden quiet reigned, and on the surface of the water nothing could be seen save the pinnacle.

"Help! Help!" yelled Tragomer, as he rose above the surface. Friendly arms were soon outstretched, and the two fugitives, half drowned and panting, were hauled into the pinnacle.

Near the two swimmers, the guard and his men, thus flung into the sea, were also struggling and supporting themselves with the débris from their boat.

"Lay low!" ordered the helmsman. The sailors obeyed. Another volley of rifle shots, fired by the native police, whistled through the air. At the same moment a second boat put out, and was rowed vigorously toward the shipwrecked natives.

"Full speed ahead!" shouted Marenval. "We will postpone our embraces for a while," he added, in gentler tones.

The pinnacle tacked, and, cutting through the sea, made for the yacht. At that moment the sun, like a ball of fire, began to sink into the waves and soon disappeared. Twilight sped rapidly on, and the shouts of the natives on the distant shore were all that could be heard. A sailor handed to Jacques and Christian a bundle of clothing which had been prepared for them. Still shivering, as much from ex-



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citement as from the cold sea-water, they threw off their dripping garments and donned the dry clothing. Not a word was exchanged until they were alongside the yacht.

"Well?" asked the captain, leaning over the side.

"All right!" replied Tragomer.

Climbing the rope-ladder that hung along the side of the vessel they stepped on deck. The pinnace was raised, and, resuming its momentarily interrupted course, the yacht, putting on full steam, set out toward the open sea.

## Chapter IV

### OUT ON THE OPEN SEA

"FREE! my dear Jacques!" said Marenval, as he embraced the young man and looked at him tenderly. "Poor fellow! It was time we came! How changed you are!"

Fréneuse's pallid face, from which all the paint of his disguise had been washed by the sea water, appeared very sad and emaciated.

"Thank you, my friends," he said, in an outburst of gratitude. "Thanks for your courage and devotion! I wish I could tell you how grateful I feel. Words fail. Do pardon me!"

Tears were streaming down his cheeks. Wiping them with the back of his hand he stifled a sob, and with an uncertain gesture left them to make his way toward the stern. There, sitting on a coil of ropes and burying his head in his hands, he plunged into deep meditation.

"We must leave him alone," said Tragomer. "He must have time to come round. The transition from abject despair to a return to life is too sudden and overwhelming. To-morrow he will be calmer. His ideas will then be more logically coherent and we can question him to advantage. I compliment you,

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Marenval. You have foiled the authorities of your country with splendid decision. You have put yourself outside the law, my dear friend."

"Heavens! Did you see that man in the bow try to kill me? He had no scruples at hazarding a safe shot. One of the bullets carried off my cap. Another inch and I should have been killed."

"Anyhow, you did not miss. They were not long before finding themselves in the water!"

"My dear Tragomer," said Marenval gravely, "I had to make up my mind. I saw that everything would be lost if I did not sink their infernal boat. Therefore, I did not hesitate a moment."

"You acted splendidly. But for you, Marenval, we should have been lost."

"I know; I am not by any means displeased with the way in which I have carried this affair through. Still, it was not the convict-keepers alone of whom I was the most afraid on your behalf. From the time that we left the yacht the pinnacle was followed by an enormous shark, which seemed as though waiting for some one to fall into the water. It is a miracle it did not make an appearance during the struggle."

"The motion of the boats, the shouts of the natives, and the speed with which it all happened probably scared him. I, too, feared we might come across some dogfish, and therefore armed myself with a cutlass, and was determined not to allow myself to be devoured without making a determined resistance."

"I hope," said Marenval coldly, "the shark will have got a bite of the fat sailor in the bows who was so bent on shooting me."

## OUT ON THE OPEN SEA

"You are becoming quite ferocious, my friend."

"That is just what I am when I am taken out of my ordinary life and element. By the bye, what about our brave Dougall?"

"According to the proposed plan, Dougall must have gone to the boat belonging to the administration, as though suspecting nothing. He will surely have been kept back by the attendant who conducted me."

"Was he the man in the bows?"

"No, he was not one of our pursuers. I am very glad of it, for he was a fine fellow, and I should have been sorry to have occasioned him any harm. He had such a comical way of addressing me; for you know, Marenval, nothing will convince the colonial authorities that this escape has not been carried through by the English."

"You have taken every precaution with this object in view. But what do you think will become of our sailor?"

"Oh, Dougall is a very intelligent fellow! He does not know a word of French. To every question he will reply: 'I do not understand; take me to the English consul.' Those are the instructions I have given him. Once before the consul he will have no further trouble. He has contributed in no way to the escape or given any help whatever. True, he accompanied me, but we separated just at the time after which he might have been involved. I have abandoned him; that will be a proof that he had nothing to do with the plot. He belongs to the crew of the *Albert Edward*, from the port of South-

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ampton. The maritime authorities of Nouméa have our papers. Out in the open the *Albert Edward* again becomes the *Magic*, and they may investigate if they wish. Meanwhile, with the hundred-pound note I have given Dougall, he will take the steamer for Sydney and reach England before we do, for he will not have this dreadful Torrès Strait to cross, bristling as it is with dangerous reefs."

Marenval nodded his head in assent and said:

"Do you think we shall be followed?"

"We shall know in an hour. But I have very little anxiety on that score. We are going like the wind, and a state despatch-boat is not likely to catch up with our trim craft. These Englishmen know how to build ships, there's no denying the fact. Here is a pleasure-yacht speeding through the water like a torpedo-boat."

"Shall we keep up this speed long?"

"Until we are out of French waters. Once in neutral water, we shall slacken down to our ordinary speed."

"When shall we be free from any possible capture?"

"About midnight."

"Well, suppose we take dinner, Tragomer."

"Certainly. This bath has given me an appetite."

"Shall we speak to Jacques?"

"No; leave him to himself. The steward will take him something to eat if he is hungry; he will be very well where he is. Solitude is good for the troubled state of mind he is now in."

They went below. Jacques, left alone in the stern

## OUT ON THE OPEN SEA

beneath the sail swollen by the wind, and leaning against the side of the boat, was overwhelmed with fatigue by reason of the strain to which his poor, weak frame had been exposed. His miraculous return to liberty had dazed him, his dull head seemed to move from side to side with the rolling of the vessel, and in the gentle breeze of the summer night he experienced for the first time in two years a delightful sensation of quiet and calm. Under his feet he felt the deck quiver with the rapid revolutions of the horizontal shaft. The sound of the water, lashed by the screw, gently lulled his ears, and he thought within himself: Every revolution of the engine, every movement of the ship, separates me from captivity and draws me nearer those who love me, and have never ceased weeping for me.

A feeling of torpor came over his limbs; but his mind, by degrees, became clearer, as though a mist had been removed, and had left it full of intelligence and action. Looking out on the vast expanse of ocean, he saw in the distance, almost lost on the horizon, the lighthouse beams shining forth like a small pale speck, decreasing little by little and ready to disappear. He was free, surrounded by friends, returning to his country and his home. But at the same time he had a struggle to go through.

A look of anxiety appeared on his brow. Liberty imposed terrible duties on him. It must be justified by the discovery of the real criminal. He could find no excuse for his escape unless he sent the unpunished criminal to replace him in the little hut by the side of the forge where the convicts themselves

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were hammering their own chains. Instinctively he stretched out his arm, and with considerable joy felt himself free from his rude manacle. The callus made by that ring of shame and bondage could plainly be seen, and would long be visible.

All the horrors of his infamous life returned to his mind; and the image of the chaplain, the only man who had attempted to alleviate his wretched lot, presented itself in his thoughts. It was this holy man who, to exhort him to resignation, reminded him of the Savior's sufferings, and pointed out to him the expiation of his past errors in the unmerited torture he had to endure. These past faults he looked upon as very grave and numerous. In his repentance he offered his regrets to heaven in prayer, asking God to accept them as a ransom of his past life.

At that time he had no hope that his fate would change. He looked upon himself as imprisoned forever in that frightful enclosure, the abode of misery, crime, and pain; and it was with a fervent heart full of resignation that he accepted his terrible destiny. A burst of gratitude came over him; he raised his eyes to heaven, and in the silence of that waste of waters, beneath the starlit firmament, a feeling of calmness and peace came over him as he prayed with fervor, certain that it was to the grace of God that he owed his salvation. The steward had approached him, and placed within reach of his hand the food his friends sent him. He neither heard nor saw him, but remained deep in meditation, enveloped by the blackness of the night. The yacht

## OUT ON THE OPEN SEA

had extinguished its lights, the more easily to elude any possible pursuit. Out on the open sea, in the rapidity of the flight, Jacques's mind, full of serenity and strength, was in perfect peace. He no longer doubted that he would prove his innocence by irrefutable tokens.

The doubt which had so long tortured him, even exciting him to believe that in a kind of delirium, which he could not call to mind, he had perhaps committed the crime he denied, was now replaced by a firm conviction of innocence. He felt he had another conscience; he became another man. The dejection caused by his confinement, which depressed and prostrated him to such an extent as to deprive him of material sensitiveness, was replaced by the intelligent pride of one who is free in body and capable of controlling his thoughts.

All night he remained in the same spot in deep meditation. The watch's regular march to and fro on the deck did not disturb him. He paid no attention to the captain, who was standing on the footbridge watching most anxiously the course of his vessel. Indeed, he was in a kind of exaltation in which all external sensations were abolished, leaving him under the influence of his inner thoughts alone. These latter were exquisite, for in them he found once more all the treasures of his refinement, his faith, and his honor, of which he had been brutally deprived for two long years. As dawn appeared, the stars began to die away. The breeze freshened, and a number of sailors appeared on deck. Jacques heaved a sigh; he understood



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that he would have to quit these immaterial spheres in which his soul had been resting and undergoing a process of purification for so many hours, and again take part in actual matter-of-fact life. He arose just as day, by a sudden transition, succeeded night. All around the ship was a vast expanse of sea. A couple of leagues away to the right a large steamer was lazily heading for the Loyalty Islands. Behind, nothing suspicious; before, the open sea, not a sail or film of smoke to be seen.

"Well, Jacques," said Tragomer, "we are out of danger at last. Now we can breathe."

Fréneuse turned round. Tragomer came up to meet him. He held out his hand with a smile.

## Chapter V

### UNDER THE UNION JACK

"PARDON me, my friend, for leaving you last night. I was like a wild beast which had escaped from prison, and was startled by the open air and a boundless horizon. I wanted to hide, to look out of some shady corner, as I was no longer accustomed to living in freedom. Now I have recovered. The bond of servitude, you see, is difficult to shake off. Especially when it has been as heavy as that I have borne."

Tragomer laid his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"You have two months before you in which to regain complete command of yourself. That is how this sea-trip will be beneficial to you. By degrees you will regain your former habits, and when we reach Europe, you will again be the Jacques of other times."

A shadow passed over Fréneuse's brow.

"The Jacques of former times? Never again. He is dead; I have left him behind in the bagnio with the garments I wore as a convict. The Jacques you are taking back will have only one object in life—to make those who loved him forget all the grief he has occasioned them."

"That I heartily approve of," said Christian. "It

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will be according to justice. But come with me into your cabin, where you may dress yourself while Marenval is rising. He is not so early a bird as myself. Besides, the emotion and fatigue he went through yesterday must have completely crushed him. But he is well pleased, I can tell you, and proud into the bargain. He would not give up his cruise for double what it is costing him. His sole regret is that he has not succeeded in keeping his white sailor cap which the ball of the convict-guard carried off. What a trophy for a man of peaceful intentions such as he is! But he will have other souvenirs. Ah, here is our captain!" A light-complexioned young man, clean-shaved, and of ruddy appearance, advanced. Tragomer said:

"Mr. Edwards, allow me to introduce my friend, the Count de Fréneuse. Just now the appearance he presents is not very flattering, but shortly you will see him to greater advantage."

"I am very pleased, sir," said the captain, with a strong English accent, "to have been of service to you. What these gentlemen told me renders the service I have done them an easy and agreeable one. We did run some risk yesterday, after all," said the Englishman, with a smile; "but this morning we have only to deal with such ships as carry this flag."

And with a proud gesture the captain pointed to the Union Jack waving at the gaff of the mast abaft.

"Then you are quite free from anxiety?" asked Tragomer.

"I am on the sea, which belongs to the whole

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world, captain of my ship, and if any one dared to challenge me, I should reply with this."

He gave a little friendly tap to one of the bronze guns resting idly on the deck. Then he added, with fine national pride:

"And all England would back me up."

"Where are we at the present moment, and what is the course we are making?" asked Tragomer.

"We are near Bowen, Australia, and we are heading for New Guinea. I am going to slacken our speed. We are under no obligation to waste our supply of coal. We shall not be able to obtain a fresh supply before reaching Batavia. Therefore we will set sail."

"Act as you judge best, captain. It is to our interest to leave everything in your hands."

Descending into the saloon, they made their way to the cabins. For the first time since he had left France, Jacques experienced something of the comfort and luxury to which he had been accustomed from childhood. A large cabin, furnished with a bed, a mirrored wardrobe, and a washstand, had been prepared for him. Perfect cleanliness was manifest in every detail, and Jacques experienced a childlike joy in discovering brushes, bottles, and all the trifling utensils and articles which bring an element of refinement and elegance into life.

Sinking into an armchair, he stared all around as though unable to satiate himself with the sight of the objects presented to his gaze. Of a sudden he turned pale. At the pillow of the bed he had noticed two portraits in a gold frame, his mother and sister.

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Clothed in black, and looking pale and wan, they seemed as though mourning for the absent loved one. On the night before leaving Southampton Marenval had received these photographs, intended for Jacques. This was, as it were, an initial promise of pardon before his actual return.

"They are greatly changed," said Jacques to his friend after a long silence.

"And yet, just then, they were beginning to hope."

"How shall I ever make them forget all they have suffered for my sake?"

"Oh! very easily! Mothers and sisters are real treasuries of indulgence. All that is necessary is to return to them. What pained them most was not that they believed you guilty, but the fact that they knew you to be unhappy."

"Tell me how they have been living the last two years."

"Like two recluses, two voluntary pariahs. They have shunned society, which they accused of ruining you, and have secluded themselves in their own home, to mourn in silence. Everything outside of yourself has become foreign to them. All who did not share their faith in your innocence and their sorrow at your martyrdom have been systematically shut out from their life and thoughts. I myself——"

"You, Christian?" exclaimed Jacques in surprise.

"Yes, because I, in the first moment of stupor, humbly acquiesced in the sentence which condemned you, and failed to make sufficiently prompt protest against the infamy imposed on you, I have been repulsed by your mother and sister. Yes, by

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your sister, whom I loved and still love, by Marie even more severely than by her mother. I have been forbidden entrance, as though I were an intruder, an enemy even. In spite of all my efforts, I could obtain no indulgence. After an absence of eighteen months, I have had to return with the first indications of the error to which you had been the victim, before Madame de Fréneuse would consent to see me. And you can form no idea of your sister's cruel severity. It was only at the last moment that I was permitted to see her, and, though she held out her hand, it was because I assured her I was going to risk my life to save you."

"Dear Marie! And you, my poor Christian, you, too, have been very unhappy on my account."

"I will have a brilliant revenge on her. When I thrust you into her arms, she will be forced to recognize that I am not ungrateful or indifferent. Her pride will become more human, Jacques, and I shall see her again smiling and affectionate as in former days."

Jacques for a moment seemed wrapped in thought, then, speaking slowly, as tho weighing the words he uttered, said:

"For twenty-four hours, Christian, I have been pondering on all you have revealed to me. The night preceding my escape, when I was trembling at the consequences my attempt might bring in its train in case of failure; that very night, too, when I found myself free on the ship's deck, alone between sky and sea in the presence of God, I thought how strange your story was, and I made up my mind to

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follow up the trail of the crime committed against me. The work of my rehabilitation seemed to be my very first duty. My mother and sister have mourned over me for two years. I have suffered inexpressible torture, and the real culprits rejoiced over my ruin and ridiculed the disgrace that had befallen me. They are monsters, and I wish to punish them. If Léa is alive, and Sorège is aware of her disappearance, if an unknown victim has been substituted for the one I have been accused of killing, the truth must be published, the motives that influenced them must be known, as well as the way in which they have succeeded in deceiving justice and myself. We must unravel the skein, so skilfully entangled, from the proofs piled up against me. It is indispensable for you to tell me what you know, and for me to inform you of what you are ignorant. I did not say everything when before the judge. I could not do so. There are mysteries on which I would not throw any light, because I should have had to compromise persons I judged to have no interest in this affair. But who knows now if I am not mistaken? It is from the mutual knowledge of what you have discovered and what I have kept back that the light of truth will probably flash forth. When we have established our facts, according to probability, if not in reality, then we shall take counsel together as to the method by which we must act to obtain the desired result."

"Ah! At last you are saying what I expected, what I foresaw!" exclaimed Tragomer, eagerly. "You did not reveal everything to the examining

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magistrate; you did not tell all to the jury? You were afraid of compromising whom? Perhaps those very persons who were ruining you! But we shall understand it all now! And this enigma I have vainly tried to solve will no longer perplex us. But let us wait till Marenval comes. He, as well as ourselves, has a right to know everything, as he is sufficiently interested in your cause for us to keep back nothing which will prove to him that it is a noble and just one."

At that moment the door opened and Cyprien made an appearance. Stretching out his hands to Jacques, he advanced with a happy smile and said:

"Well! Is our passenger beginning to recover from his emotion?"

"Your protégé can not thank you too much for rescuing him."

"My dear friend, we shall have two months to live together and plenty of time for mutual congratulations. Rescue apart, we will take a magnificent voyage with you, Jacques. And as we shall spend the time in becoming more impressed than ever with your innocence, our minds will be perfectly at ease."

Marenval's kind, jovial manner restored to a state of calm the already too-exalted imagination of his two young friends. By giving them a just appreciation of things he brought them back to a condition of equilibrium.

"My dear Jacques, we must, in the first place, give you a more civilized appearance. My servant will be here shortly to shave you and trim your hair. In



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the wardrobe you will find some linen and clothes such as will fit you. Then, when you are washed and dressed, you will feel more at home. There is nothing like being in one's ordinary clothes to make one resume discontinued habits. When you are ready, come to the dining-room, where we will take lunch; then afterward, if you feel like it, we will have a chat."

The servant entered the cabin; Marenval and Christian waved a friendly gesture to their guest and went out on the deck.

## Chapter VI

### TWO YEARS AGO

No one who saw Jacques dressed in a costume of white swan-skin and wearing a trim sailor's cap, stretched idly out in a rocking-chair and smoking an excellent cigar, after lunching with his two friends, could have recognized in this young yachtsman the wretched-looking convict, who only the day before was a miserable inmate of the bagnio at Nou. The transformation had been effected by the valet Marenval had brought with him, for he could not do without this remarkable man's services. A whole wardrobe had been prepared for the escaped convict, shower-bath, shaving utensils, brushes—in fact, all the most minute necessities of a fin-de-siècle toilet. He was a sunburnt Fréneuse—thin, emaciated, close-cropped, and beardless, but still a Fréneuse who had regained his look and smile of former days. He said to his companions:

"I must now give you such explanations as will allow of our studying the problem in question, and of solving it, I hope. First of all, I will account for my position with regard to Léa Pérelli. As you know, I lived with her for nearly three years. In the beginning I was passionately in love. On her side, too, she also appeared to love me sincerely.

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When I first met her she had just come from Florence, which city she had been obliged to leave because of the scandal caused by her rupture with and divorce from the Chevalier San-Martino, her husband, aide-de-camp of the Count de Turin. She was a beautiful blonde, tall, dark-eyed, with the aristocratic hands of a patrician; her appearance created a deep impression wherever she went. Devoid of wit, tho very intelligent and well-read, she possessed physical attractions to a supreme degree. It was difficult to be near her without falling madly in love. Her haughty bearing and her talent as a singer, which had gained her a brilliant success in the aristocratic salons of Rome, took complete possession of one whose imagination was already troubled by her beauty.

"When I met her, she lived in the Rue d'Astorg in a furnished apartment, quietly spending what remained of her dowry, generously returned by the Chevalier San-Martino; more than she merited, in fact, considering the far from flattering treatment to which his wife had submitted him. She was waited upon very indifferently by a maid and a young valet she had brought with her from Italy. The disorder of every-day existence, the carelessness of the servants, and the irregularity of the service presented quite a striking picture of Italian negligence. It was a very curious mixture of luxury and poverty. During the first few months of our liaison I have seen Léa in a silk dressing-gown and wearing a pair of sapphire earrings worth twenty thousand francs, lunch at a table without a napkin, eating

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herrings from a cracked plate, and drinking champagne from an ordinary tumbler. Appearance, order, and decency in life were dead letters for her. The only things she deemed of any importance were her fancy and caprice, and these she satisfied before everything else.

"I had met her at a charity concert at which she had been singing in a very charming way some Hungarian airs, accompanied by Maracksy, and there I fell under the spell of her beauty. Standing there on the stage amid several society women who were present to aid in the work, she looked a very queen. She was chaperoned by the Marquis Gionori, an old beau, well painted and laced up, who had an uneasy way of caressing one's fingers when shaking hands. He was no very redoubtable guardian, so I obtained an introduction to the ravishing Italian, and the very next morning called at her home and left my card. I received a prompt reply, and next week was invited to call and take a cup of tea to musical accompaniment.

"I took care not to miss the opportunity, and at ten o'clock I reached the Rue d'Astorg, where I was received in the hall by the young rascal of a valet, who assumed an air of affected dignity. A dozen persons of mixed position were present, from the light Italian tenor, with his faulty French pronunciation, to the grave diplomat, and from the giddy young widow to the genuine dowager. It was a kind of demi-monde, in which the tinsel was mixed with the solid, but where also it was easy to see that the solid was promptly on the point of dis-

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appearing and giving place to fancy of every kind. To obtain this object and precipitate the disaggregation of the mixture, all that was needed was the introduction of a fresh element. My entry on the scene brought about the solution.

"I was twenty-five years of age, free, rich, and very popular in society. I had delightful relations, was luxurious in my tastes, and thus attracted Léa by the external side of my life, which was the one to which her Italian nature was most susceptible. My carriage, with a fine pair of horses harnessed to it, waiting there beneath her window, the handsome style of my livery, the refinement of my dress and appearance, the sonority of my family name, the genuineness of my title—in short, the attention paid to her when we went out together—all this was more pleasing and flattering to her than all the attention and affection I bestowed on her. At first her love for me was one of the intellect alone, but this rapidly changed into a love of the senses.

"After a few weeks a complete change was effected in her existence. She no longer received any of the persons I had found at her home at the commencement; with incredible facility she had replaced them by friends of mine. Altho possessed of a very good education, she had no idea of social distinctions, and was as ready to receive people of low birth as those of noble origin; vulgarity of manners did not appear to shock her—in fact, she did not appear to notice them.

"Often have I found her seated in front of her Italian maid, a stout Lombardy girl, playing cards

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with her, both smoking cigarettes. On my reproaching her she said:

“‘What does it matter? She is at my disposal both to distract me in a game at *bélique*, and to button my boots, to prevent me from bending. She receives her pay; she does her work. That is sufficient. As for the cigarette, everybody smokes in Italy, even court ladies.’

“To her lack of respectability she added the most careless ignorance of economy. Never have I seen her preoccupied as to how she should pay for what she bought, or meet the expenses of everyday life. So long as she had any money she spent it, and when the fund was exhausted, she deprived herself. It was strange to see this woman, accustomed to luxury and flinging money about with princely lavishness, in spite of all, having so few needs and contented with so little. I have surprised her, before being initiated into the difficulties of her position, living on the food of her country, which, she pretended, she ate by preference, tho it cost only a few pence per day.

“Then one fine morning I called on her during the visit of a bailiff provided with a distress and a whole avalanche of stamped papers. I found Léa in tears before her jewels she loved so well, and which were very costly, now on the point of being given up at the request of her tradesmen, who had become exasperated by her negligence of and scorn for engagements contracted. My first impulse was to open my pocket-book and say to the bailiff: ‘How much?’ Léa, in a fury of amorous disinterestedness, pro-

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tested with tears and refused. But the bailiff had seen the opportunity of being paid; he paid no attention to the protests of the debtor, and for the first time Léa cost me money.

"Had I not offered it, in all probability she would never have asked me for any. But from the day I had first paid she found it quite natural to continue to profit by my generosity. At this point begins the really deplorable period of my existence. The accusation to which I succumbed was based on the acts of folly I committed to keep up Léa's establishment. As a single young fellow I had the where-withal to live and meet all the costly requirements of a life of pleasure. At that time I had already broken into the inheritance from my father; but the land I had sold brought in no large revenue, and my fortune had not been seriously diminished. I still had an income of forty thousand francs a year.

"To meet Léa's necessities and my own personal requirements, this would scarcely have been a sufficient sum, even if my current expenses had been governed by strict economy. But Léa's disorderly life was in a measure constitutional, like a malady, and I myself was not very foreseeing, the consequence being that after a few months I found myself in the greatest difficulties. Why recall to you the details of this sad time? You know them as well as myself. You, Marenval, have helped me on different occasions to pay pressing debts, the failure to settle which would have irretrievably compromised me. You, Christian, have attempted to tear me away from my evil manners and low living. Gam-

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bling had become my sole resource, and to sustain my strength, wasted by whole nights spent at the baccarat-table, I began to drink.

“During these ill-fated years, when I gradually sank into the mire of infamy, all reasoning power had disappeared, my very affections had become atrophied. I lived like a beast, and the light of intelligence, still manifest in me, served only to satisfy my vices; for though Léa had become attached to me from gratitude at my efforts to afford her a rich and happy life, I for my part was beginning to tire of her, and did not remain faithful to her. Doubtless it would have been better to give her up, return again to my mother and sister, and recommence a quiet life. I was so young that this would have been possible, but I persisted in my liaison with a kind of stupid obstinacy, as though by giving up Léa I should be renouncing all the sacrifices I had already made for her. To sum up the whole in one sentence, I was in the position of a gambler bent on winning back the money he has lost. She cost me such a large sum that I could not make up my mind to leave her. Besides, the excited state of mind I often found her in was a cause for apprehension.

“This haughty, violent woman often relapsed into her life of former times. On these occasions her pride rendered her one to be feared. One day I saw her, when that heavy Lombardy maid of hers, from whom she tolerated such inexplicable acts of familiarity, had replied to her in insolent tones, fling herself upon the girl and strike her repeatedly, her own brutality seeming to inflame her the more, until



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she ran the risk of inflicting some serious injury on the girl. She told me that on such occasions she lost her reason and everything appeared red to her. I could kill, she said, and would not be afraid of any man. So often had she shown her jealousy, so often threatened me with her wrath, if I deceived her, that I was by no means free from anxiety as to what would take place if the proofs of my infidelity were given her. To tell the truth, I did not think she would use violence against me. She loved me too well. Still, I was capable of believing that she might strike herself.

“‘What would be left for me if I lost you?’ she used to say. ‘My life would be ruined. I have left everything to please you. When I met you, I was a society woman. What am I now? My family no longer owns me. I receive no reply to my letters—nothing but the paltry pension allotted to me through the intermediary of a business man. For your sake I have broken with my whole past life; your future existence must belong to me.’

“One evening, when singing for some friends, Vignot, the well-known composer, heard her, and was struck with admiration for her voice and style. He proposed that she should sing at the Opera in the principal rôle of the new work he had promised the directors. But Léa refused. It had been agreed between herself and her family that she should never sing in a theater. She had made an engagement never to appear in public, and with a fidelity to her promise which she boasted about, she refused the splendid opportunities offered to her. It ried to

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obtain her acceptance of Vignot's proposal, as I should have been pleased to see her earn her own living. The burden of my debts, continually increasing, weighed on me heavier than ever. Perhaps in the intoxication of success I thought she would have abandoned me. She would have had to receive so much adulation, such enthusiastic admiration, that she would doubtless have left me free to leave her in order to become her own mistress again.

"But her indolence and will alike refused these proposals, and she remained inactive in a life of disorder and negligence. She received her compatriots and my friends. I knew she had been obliged to repel the solicitations of certain of them. This did not trouble me, as they would have done me a service by taking her from me. That was one reason why they met with no success. Christian alone of all my friends had never had any sympathy with Léa. He had speedily seen where that liaison would land me, and how fruitful in trouble it would be for me. All he could possibly do to prevent me taking the responsibility of Léa's actions on myself he had attempted, to such an extent as to quarrel with me for a time and with her altogether.

"Sorège, on the contrary, never ceased lauding Léa's beauty, charm, and distinction. Had he not been so expansive in my presence one might well have imagined him to be in love. But he did not conceal his feelings sufficiently from me to warrant my suspecting him. He was very attentive to Léa, kept her company whenever I left her alone, and played the rôle of a perfect confidant. He had been

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refused by my sister, to whom he had proposed marriage, and at that time called less often on my mother, whom I, besides, saw very seldom. His hostility toward Tragomer, who paid no attention to Léa, showed itself by skilful sarcasm and continual insinuations.

"It was in the third year of my liaison with Léa, and never had my position been so grave as then. A catastrophe was bound to befall me. Had I not been implicated in the tragic adventure which brought about my downfall, I should have been drawn into the most desperate expedients; a regular current of madness was carrying me away. As a rule, Léa invited none but men. She was convinced that women's society is useless, and, perhaps, dangerous.

"'If I invite a woman to my home,' she said, 'and she is ugly and stupid, my friends will receive no pleasure from her society. If she is witty and beautiful, Jacques might fall in love with her, and I should risk losing him.'

"For these sage reasons she did not associate with women. She made only one exception after three years' liaison with me, when she considered me as being attached to her by the strongest of bonds. This infringement of her rule was the cause of my misfortune. She had met a very elegant, very pretty young woman—a tolerably good singer—who had pleased her by the grace of her character, as well as by a mysterious and perverse attraction to which I should not have imagined her capable of yielding. Léa had not shown herself to be vicious;

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she was deeply in love with me, and had never appeared disposed to go to Lesbos. Her new friend undertook to modify her life, and, with the ardor she displayed in everything she undertook, Léa became as jealous of Jeanne Baud as she had been of me."

Up to that point neither Marenval nor Tragomer had given a sign or uttered a word. They had listened to Jacques in absolute silence, protesting against none of his repetitions—not even trying to abridge any part of his recital—in the hope of seizing on some useful indication, some new item of information. But when the name of Jeanne Baud was pronounced for the first time by Fréneuse, they exchanged looks, communicating to one another the impression mutually felt. Light was beginning to break through the darkness in which they had hitherto been groping. Jeanne Baud's appearance in the existence of Jacques and Léa gave a decisive importance to Tragomer's discovery. The bond between Jenny Hawkins and Jacques now showed itself, and the first thread of the toils in which the unhappy man had been entrapped was now discovered. Jacques, in surprise, exclaimed:

"What is there in my tale which astonishes you so much?"

"The name of Jeanne Baud, which, if we are not mistaken, has just been uttered by you for the first time."

"I had serious reasons for not speaking of this young woman. You will understand them shortly, when I have related the whole story."

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"But, before resuming, just one detail: Tell us something of this Jeanne Baud. Was she tall or short, blonde or dark-complexioned, with brown or blue eyes? Give us as exact a portrait of her as possible."

"When I first made her acquaintance at Léa's home she was a ravishing young woman of twenty-five, of very white skin, with splendid shoulders, dark hair, and gray eyes. She and Léa formed a striking pair—same height, figure, and strength. The only difference was that Léa was as blonde as Jeanne was dark-complexioned. Both were strikingly beautiful when together. I believe the extraordinary effect they produced had much to do with their intimacy. . . . They were proud of it, and took pleasure in producing this effect on different occasions."

"One more question," asked Tragomer. "Was not Léa Pérelli painted?"

"Yes. The Titian blonde color of her hair was not natural. I never knew her other than blonde. The natural color must have been dark chestnut. . . . She made her hair wavy by artificial means, while Jeanne Baud's hair was naturally wavy."

"Very good," said Christian; "you may continue."

Turning toward Marenval, he gave a sigh of satisfaction and said:

"Now, I am certain."

"I remained," continued Jacques, "a long time without suspecting the secret reasons these two had for not leaving one another. I continually found

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Jeanne in Léa's rooms, and whenever the latter went out without me, it was to go to her friend's.

"The beginning of this intimacy had been the wish expressed by Jeanne Baud that Léa should give her lessons in the pronunciation of Italian. The young singer was anxious to leave operetta and to sing the Italian répertoire. Léa's great talent, her style, and the perfection of her accent were very useful to Jeanne. Accordingly they had begun to study seriously.

"They no longer left one another's society, and I, engrossed in my pleasures and occupations of all kinds, had no suspicions of the evidently passionate nature of the affection these two women showed one another. Sorège was the first to draw my attention to the condition of things. With his usual prudence, by means of sarcastic insinuations, he aroused my suspicions and forced my eyes open. My loose way of living, it must be said, had quite demoralized me, and both my intelligence and my affections were in a pitiable condition. The idea of Léa being faithless to me inspired in me neither disgust nor anger. A morbid desire to obtain Jeanne Baud's love from this time took possession of my thoughts. One day, calling on Léa about four o'clock, I found her with her hat on and a business look about her.

"‘I am obliged to leave for an hour,’ she said. ‘My father has entrusted a friend of mine with a commission for me, and I must go to the Grand Hotel to-day to see him, as he is leaving to-morrow for London.’

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"‘In that case I will leave you. Au revoir, to-night.’

"‘No, on the contrary, stay. I have given my servants a holiday. Jeanne is to call shortly. Ask her to wait for me, and we will dine together.’

"‘Very well.’

"In a moment the idea of winning over Léa’s friend took possession of me. Léa left the house, and I waited patiently for Jeanne. She soon arrived, all smiling, dressed in gray silk, and wearing a hat trimmed with blue birds, giving an appearance of extraordinary brilliancy to her dark hair and pale complexion. She did not appear astonished at Léa’s absence, took off her hat, threw her gloves on the table, and sat down near me. I do not know what I really said to her. So far as I remember, I spoke to her of her beauty. Her head was reclining against the back of the divan close to mine. After a few minutes I passed my arm around her and drew her close to me without the faintest resistance on her part.

"From this day I firmly made up my mind to leave Léa. Jeanne was far more gentle and more womanlike than the proud Italian. She acknowledged that she had long loved me, and had often felt inclined to tell me so.

"She developed a passionate affection for me, and I found myself obliged to console her for a treason of which I had been the victim. I could not, however, deceive Léa as to my real sentiments. Every day I detached myself from her a little more, and was determined to risk everything to free myself

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from her influence. I needed a considerable sum to pay my debts and to give Léa, when I left her, the means wherewith to live for a year. To have recourse to credit was out of the question. Only one way out of the difficulty remained, the gambling table.

"I collected all the ready money I had, sold all my jewels and a few valuable trinkets, and spent two nights at play, during which I succeeded in winning a hundred and eighty thousand francs. This was sufficient to completely clear me. I was not satisfied, however, and after being so well treated by fortune, I determined to threaten her and obtain the utmost she could give me. A third night I went to the bank; before me was all I had won in forty-eight hours. But I must have double that amount to pay the debts which were crushing me and leave a large sum to put into execution the plan I had formed of going abroad.

"The short time which elapsed between the satisfaction I experienced at seeing myself in possession of a sum sufficient to allow me to clear up my indebtedness, and to live freely again, and the resolution I took to play double or quits, was the most important in my life. If at that moment I had had courage to withdraw, all these disastrous results might have been avoided. My liaison with Léa would have been broken by force of circumstances. I should have returned home, resumed a quiet family life, and been saved.

"But how could I take such a good resolution? How could conscience appeal to me? My nobler in-



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instincts seemed completely destroyed. I had nothing left in me but evil inclinations. I had forgotten my poor mother and sister, who were entreating me to return to them. The satisfaction of my whims and the satiating of my most depraved passions were my only law. I was despicable and cowardly. Seeing my poor mother on her knees begging me not to leave her, or bring dishonor on her gray hairs, I turned a deaf ear to her prayers and laughed at her despair.

“Ah! How often in my nights of pain and distress, in chains, with my companions in misery and in crime, have I brought back to mind those frightful scenes when I had the shameless audacity to meet a mother’s tears with scornful and ferocious cynicism! How I regretted the blind obstinacy which abandoned me to the most depraved counsels of my flatterers and parasites, and prevented me from listening to the gentle entreaties of the two angels who tried to save me. But fate had decided. I was singled out for misfortune—justly enough, I must confess.

“On the third night, as though fate was madly pursuing me and determined to make me pay for the favors with which I had not remained content, I lost all I had won on the two previous nights and forty thousand francs in addition, lent me on my signature.

“Utterly prostrated and in a state of stupefaction I went to Léa, who could easily see that I was overwhelmed by a misfortune I looked upon as irreparable. In fact, all I possessed was in the hands of

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money-lenders. My mother had paid large sums for me, and my friends, tired of lending me money I did not return, were beginning to shun my society. I had reached the last extremity, and in the crisis I was passing through had the choice of only two courses—to kill myself or to leave the country.

“Suicide I scarcely thought of, but expatriating myself was in full accord with my plans. For the honor of my name, however, I must pay the debt I had incurred at the gaming-table. Forty thousand francs must be found. I blush for shame, my friends, so disgraceful is the narrative I must now relate. All my misfortunes have been justified by the indelicacy of my conduct. Léa offered me her jewels so that I might pawn them. Had I refused, had I flung myself once more at the feet of my mother, I am certain she would have made further sacrifices to relieve me from my difficulties. But I should have had to give pledges, quit my disgraceful life and return to the quiet of my family. I would not do this. Death or flight, but not honesty of life.

“I accepted Léa's offer, carried off everything—pearls, sapphires, and diamonds, and this, understand me, with the fixed intention of seeing her no more. I obtained eighty thousand francs from a pawnbroker. I sent the pawn ticket to Léa, so that with the money I relied on forwarding her before its expiration, she might redeem the jewels; then I went to pay my debt. I called on Jeanne Baud, who had made all preparations to accompany me to London, and obtained her promise to meet me at Havre the following morning. Then I asked

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Sorège to lunch with me, as he was the only one of my friends in whom I had sufficient confidence to reveal all my troubles and my coming departure.

"He seemed extremely surprised on hearing that I was reduced to such extremities. He blamed me for borrowing money from Léa, placed his purse at my disposal; but his means were not sufficient to help me materially. In a very friendly way he offered me his services and was willing to inform Léa of my departure. After remarking that it might be dangerous for me to tell Léa for what country I was bound, he accompanied me home, helped me to complete my preparations, and went with me to the station. There, after an affectionate leave-taking, he made me promise to write to him if I needed anything. Then the train steamed away. After that I only saw him at the Assize Court, where he spoke in my favor with considerable moderation and ability.

"You are well acquainted with the manner in which I was arrested and brought back to Paris, as well as with the dénouement of this tragic occurrence. Now you know all that happened, all I concealed from the examining magistrate, the jury, my lawyer, even from my mother. What would have been the use of bringing this poor Jeanne Baud, whose only fault was her love for me, into the scandalous intricacies of this trial? I felt grateful to her, and kept her aloof from all this filth and blood. She was to leave for England, where an engagement at the Alhambra, in London, required her presence. Brutally dragged off to prison as I was, and after-

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ward flung into the silence and obscurity of that tomb—bagnio as it is called—I do not know what became of her. I hope she is not so unhappy as I have been, for it would not be right or just for all implicated in my ill-fated destiny to be as pitilessly struck down.”

## Chapter VII

### THE SECRET SPRINGS OF A DIABOLICAL PLOT

JACQUES stopped. Night was coming on. The whole day had been spent in the unfolding of this terrible story. Tragomer and Marenval had long ceased smoking, carried away as they were by the intense interest of the drama, in which they were now so completely involved, and with the secret springs of which they were better acquainted than the victim himself. A long silence ensued, during which Jacques gradually recovered from the emotion which, as he lived over again the various scenes of the past two years, had blanched and furrowed his countenance. Then with his usual sang-froid Tragomer said:

"My dear Jacques, your frank confession has had the effect of leaving no doubt whatever in our minds. I can guess from Marenval's evident satisfaction that the truth is now as clear to him as it is to me."

"Quite!" interjected Cyprien. "It is as clear as daylight."

"Still," resumed Christian, "though it is with regret, I must inform you of the fate of Jeanne Baud. The poor girl has not met with a destiny so happy

## THE SECRET SPRINGS OF A DIABOLICAL PLOT

as that you have so generously desired for her. At the time you were arrested she was dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed Jacques, in horror. "How could she be dead?"

"My dear friend, the evidence is manifest. Since Léa Pérelli is alive, traveling up and down the world under the name of Jenny Hawkins, after assuming that of Jeanne Baud for a few days, it is because the one she represents is dead. Your pretended victim of the Rue Marbeuf could be none other than Jeanne Baud—was most certainly Jeanne Baud."

"But that is impossible," protested Jacques.

"It is absolutely certain!" resumed Tragomer. "The identity of the victim had to be established by her presence in Léa's very apartment. What other person, if not Léa, could have been killed in the Rue Marbeuf? Who else could wear her clothes and jewels? Oh! precautions capable of deceiving everybody were skilfully taken. The woman was disfigured, her face was rendered unrecognizable by pistol-shots. Who could help suspecting that the body was that of Léa Perelli? Jeanne Baud was of the same height and figure; you yourself have just acknowledged it. Then who would suspect a substitution? You did not even think of it, did not entertain any doubt whatever. The dead woman is shown to you, and you do not hesitate to recognize her. And yet Léa was alive and Jeanne Baud had disappeared."

"But the dead woman was blonde," said Jacques.

"Jeanne Baud had dark chestnut-colored hair."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"Did I not ask you," exclaimed Christian, "if Léa dyed her hair?"

Fréneuse gave a gesture of horror, his eyes looked hollow beneath his contracted brows.

"Ah! ah!" continued Tragomer, "you are beginning to understand. You dimly divine the atrocious, the ghastly semblance they made the unfortunate victim assume. Those who carried out this bloody intrigue must have been possessed of extraordinary sang-froid, for they thought of everything. They dressed and decked out the dead woman and dyed her hair, before firing at her head the shots destined to disfigure her. Certainly they were bent on ruining you, but they were also determined to save themselves. The real assassins are those who have accomplished this profane deed and dishonored murder itself, by thus disfiguring death. Resist the evidence no longer, for now everything is certain. Were not the jewels redeemed the very morning after the murder? You could not have done this, as you had not the necessary sum, and had, besides, given up the pledges to Léa. You were accused of having sold them, because an explanation of the redemption was to be found, and justice wishes everything to be explained. But it is certain that it was Léa who received back her jewels before leaving. Everything was arranged in such a way as to make of you a thief and an assassin. The effect sought for was obtained. It was in vain that you resisted, and showed the forty thousand francs remaining, after paying your debt of honor. It was of no avail to pretend that, since you had left Paris, you could

## THE SECRET SPRINGS OF A DIABOLICAL PLOT

not possibly have redeemed the jewels. The only answer vouchsafed to you was: 'You have sold the pledges.' As it was impossible to prove the contrary, your ruin was complete. For then everything led to the crime. You had killed Léa to take back from her the pledges. Theft and assassination were logical sequences of such an act. And that was the very thing wanted for a safeguard to society and the triumph of truth!"

Jacques, with sorrowful mien and bowed head, was no longer listening. He was lost in reverie. Tragomer had convinced him. The secret springs of the plot were now evident to him. But they had been so skilfully set that, as he saw them, so to speak, working under his very eyes, he wondered what he could have done to escape them, and whether, even now, he would succeed in bringing to justice the real culprits. At this thought, he suddenly raised his head and, with reddened cheeks and sparkling eyes, exclaimed:

"Who has committed such a terrible crime? You, Tragomer, who are so well acquainted with all the circumstances of the murder, can you name the assassins?"

"Ah! my dear friend, we are now entering the region of hypotheses. What Marenval and myself, after our first inquiries, were certain of, was your innocence. Much less certain were the means of establishing it. We had to deal with those who were so strong that simply to arouse their suspicions would have sufficed to make all investigation impossible. Léa Pérelli, under Sorège's warning, would



## IN DEEP ABYSS

have disappeared, and no one would have known in what part of the world to look for her. To sum up, at present, we have nothing but appearances of guilt. But these appearances are terrible, weighing alike on Léa and on Sorège; but then what are the motives under which they acted? Powerful as are the moral presumptions capable of being formed from your story, and from the knowledge we now possess of the relations existing at the time between Jeanne Baud and yourself, after all they are nothing but presumptions. I suspected some such mystery as the one you have just revealed to us. Still, we must have formal proofs, and, with your help, we will seek them. That is why it was necessary to rescue you. Had we waited till your innocence had been proved, our whole lives might have been spent in a probably fruitless search. We preferred to begin at the very outset, and to open the gates of your prison. Now you are free to act. The first part of the drama is ending, the second about to commence."

As Jacques remained dreamily meditating on the frightful problem now before them, Marenval said:

"The most exciting part of this affair, my dear friend, is that it is a regular challenge to ordinary common sense. To reach a *dénouement* appeared so perfectly impossible, that, before leaving France, we consulted one of our most eminent magistrates. Indeed, I may as well name him; it was Pierre de Vesin. His curiosity was only equaled by his astonishment. Still, he had not the shadow of a doubt that we were courting failure. It was the struggle

## THE SECRET SPRINGS OF A DIABOLICAL PLOT

of the earthen pot against the iron pan. What can one do against that formidable power called justice? It is shielded by its codes, defended by all its legal auxiliaries, and finally rendered invulnerable by a social necessity which demands that its decrees should be infallible. And dare we undertake a war against a Bastile more impregnable than the first, for it contains the very palladium of order, and protects the sovereign majesty of the State's claim? Very well. Yes! We will test our fortune. It is extravagant, incomprehensible! Tragomer and I have already risked the galleys to rescue you from captivity, by our resistance of the police, and our conduct as regular buccaneers. But all this is absolutely nothing to us! Our minds are made up. Never has the proverb 'The end justifies the means' had a more rigorous application than in this matter. We will succeed at whatever cost. And when we have furnished full proof that you were a victim and not a culprit, that you have been sentenced as the result of a monstrous legal error, well! we will see whether there are, in our land of daring and generosity, gendarmes to arrest, and judges to punish us. For my part, I have not the slightest remorse or uneasiness, or even hesitation. And I am delighted with my voyage!"

Cyprien's simple good-humor had smoothed down the contracted features of his friends. The contrast between the extraordinary gravity of the deeds committed and the habitual placidity of him who committed them gave his declaration a pungent savor of diletanteism. On this occasion Marenval showed

## IN DEEP ABYSS

himself sublime in his heedlessness. He trampled laws under foot, and set the public powers at defiance with a quiet serenity of soul only equaled by that of a hero or a bandit. And yet his frank, open countenance, his healthy cheeks, shut in by grayish whiskers, and his kind eyes sparkling with pleasure, gave one the impression that he was neither a hero nor a bandit. He looked like a rich "bourgeois," traveling for his own pleasure. In fact, under the canvas awning, in the fresh evening breeze, lulled by the rhythm of the waves splashing against the ship's sides, with the slanting rays of the setting sun shining on them, the three friends, seated in their rocking-chairs on the deck of this pretty yacht, heading for the Dutch colonies, seemed more intent on enjoying life than hunting for a tragic secret.

## Chapter VIII

### PLANS OF FUTURE ACTION

"STILL," resumed Jacques, "if I have related what you did not know of my adventure, tell me that part of your researches of which I am ignorant. Trago-mer gave me no precise explanation when he came for me to Nou. I should like to know under what conditions we shall have to resist our adversaries; what Sorège is doing; and where Léa is."

"My dear friend," said Christian, "you surely know that when I saw you in that hut I had something else to do besides telling you stories. The first thing was to bring you away, and you seemed by no means to have made up your mind to follow me. Now we have two months before us to discuss and form our plans. We shall not waste our time. What we were in the greatest dread of was your escape, which, if announced in the papers, would have put the real culprits on their guard. But on this point of vital interest the administration of the penitentiary itself took care to reassure us. The escapes are systematically kept from the knowledge of the public. A telegram will be sent to France, the Minister will know all, but will say nothing. When the governor's secretary informed me that they trusted principally to the sharks and

## IN DEEP ABYSS

the natives when a convict escaped, I could have embraced him. Now, however, we are free from all risk. We will surprise Sorège in the way that will be to our best advantage. What is most important for you to know now is that Jenny Hawkins will return to Europe next spring, and will sing in London for the first time since she has changed her name. She imagines herself quite safe on account of her transformation, and ready to brave the looks of those who knew her formerly, and it is certain that, altho I, for my part, hesitated when I saw her appear with dark hair, not a single one of those who have simply met her, or known her very slightly, will discover her former personality under the new. The keenest will only say: 'Jenny Hawkins resembles poor Léa Pérelli.' Nothing more. She runs no risk. As for Sorège, he has very skilfully arranged to spend the season with his prospective father-in-law and his fiancée in the Isle of Wight and in London. Honest Julius Harvey has no suspicion that he is himself to take Sorège to Jenny Hawkins. We shall therefore break in upon the combinations of your enemies, who will not have been able to form their plans, and will be obliged to defend themselves, on a foreign ground, hindered by all kinds of social obstacles. Nothing less will be needed to make the game even, and to give us a chance of victory."

"Then Sorège is about to marry?" said Jacques dreamily, "and she is an American; very rich, doubtless?"

"Excessively wealthy. Her father is the king of

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the prairie. He is a kind of arch-millionaire shepherd, a Laban, to whom Sorège wishes to play the part of a Jacob. He went with him last year to the Far West to inspect his stock. It was during this journey that I discovered his complicity with Léa Pérelli."

"And what kind of lady is his fiancée?"

"Ah, you are interested in the matter? Well, you will see her. She is a little American, eccentric and impetuous, who will require some managing. I would not swear that she is without Indian blood in her veins. If ever she hears of Sorège's villainy I should pity the man, for she would morally scalp him in her rage."

"And you think that neither Léa nor Sorège suspects the possibility of my reappearance?"

"How should they? They must look upon you as quite as much buried as is the murdered woman. I have no doubt that Sorège was uneasy at hearing me make inquiries about Léa's existence, and the relations he kept up with her. His attitude and words—everything, in fact—proves that he guessed me to be already partly in possession of the truth. But between that part and the whole there exist such gaps that he is quite convinced I shall never succeed in finding the key to the enigma. And he is right since, even after this bold attempt of ours we are still at the mercy of events and individuals, and shortly you will have to appear yourself to confound and stagger him, and show up his accomplice."

"I shall succeed in this, rest assured," said Jacques firmly. "You shall not find that all you

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have done for me has been in vain. I have entered on the same path as yourselves, and I shall continue in it to its utmost limit. If Sorège, as you assure me, and as I am beginning to believe, has played such an abominable part in my terrible experience, I tell you that he shall be punished for it, as he deserves to be. As for Léa——”

He passed his hands over his face, which had suddenly become overshadowed.

“I can not tell what motives could have impelled her to seek my ruin with such malevolence. I have done her great wrong, but however guilty I have been, she has taken too terrible a revenge. Had she exacted my life that would perhaps have been excusable. But to crush me beneath such a load of infamy, dishonor my family, and inflict on us all a grief and sorrow the end of which could only have been in death, is the deed of a mind so depraved that I consider myself henceforth as free to act without the slightest consideration for her. I do not think I shall go beyond my right if I defend myself as I have been attacked—to the death. You may therefore rely on me, my friends, as I do on you. For your justification and my rehabilitation, we must succeed. In the struggle now beginning, I have only my life to risk. In this there is little merit, for it is of no considerable worth now. Still, I esteem it as highly as I do Sorège's life. But we have two months before us in which to form our plans, as Christian said a moment ago. We will talk no more now, and you will permit me to become more accustomed to my new life of liberty. I need both a

## PLANS OF FUTURE ACTION

moral and physical recovery, for I intend to be equal to whatever is expected of me."

It was growing dark out on the deck. The tropical night had suddenly fallen, and the furrow left by the wake of the ship was lit up with a phosphorescent gleam.

Through the darkness, in which the forms of the three friends could be dimly distinguished, Marenval's voice was heard saying:

"It is now February 15th. At this moment in Paris it is probably icy cold, and the people outside are wading through snow. Here we are enjoying a summer temperature. When we reach the Mediterranean, the month of April will have brought back the sun. We will coast along the shore for a few days, so that our presence there may become known, then we will round Gibraltar and head swiftly for England. It is then that we shall have to enter the field of action. Meanwhile, we will have a pleasant time together. We have 'A cloudless sky and a placid sea,' as the song goes. As we reach port, we will send a telegram to my servant with orders to take it to Madame de Fréneuse. Once reassured as to the fate of her son, everything will be well."

"Dinner is served," said the steward, mounting to the deck.

"Very well, come along."

And with Jacques in the middle leaning on his friends' arms, they directed their steps toward the dining-room.







## PART III



111

## Chapter I

### IN LONDON

As Miss Jenny Hawkins was returning, about ten o'clock in the morning, her arms laden with flowers she had just bought at Covent Garden Market, her maid-servant opened the door of her room and said:

"If you please, madame, a gentleman has called. He is waiting in the salon."

"Who is it?"

"Here is the card the gentleman requested me to hand you on your return."

Jenny Hawkins took the card and read: "Comte Jean de Sorège." Without taking time to remove her hat and cape she handed the flowers to her maid, opened the door of the salon, and entered. Seated near the window in the little room furnished with massive English upholstery, Sorège was looking out into the street. He turned quickly round, and the young actress approached him, fresh and smiling after her morning walk:

"Your last night's triumph," he said, "has not tired you, it appears, as you are up so early."

He held out his hand. She did not appear to notice the movement, and, drawing near a mirror, removed her hat and arranged her hair, as she said:

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"Then, you were at the performance? Everything passed off well. . . . Rovelli came in for a great deal of applause. . . . And so did I."

Returning to him, she took a seat on a low chair near the fireplace.

"Yes. I was at the theater," he said; "and I was not the only one watching you. In the audience were others equally interested in you."

"Your fiancée, doubtless, and the excellent Julius Harvey?" said Jenny in ironical tones, and with a keen glance of her bright eyes.

"Yes, indeed, Miss Harvey and her father were among your most enthusiastic admirers," said Sorège. "As a compatriot they owe you their tribute of praise. But I was not alluding to them—rather to two of your former acquaintances—Christian de Tragomer and old Marenval."

The features of the prima donna contracted. Her eyelids drooped, and her lips quivered. She said:

"Yes? They have just arrived, I suppose?"

"They came yesterday morning. I have come to put you on your guard against any surprise, in case you suddenly find yourself in their presence."

She made a gesture of weariness, as she said:

"I thought I might rely on more complete security. Oh, this burden of anxiety and care ever falling over me just when I imagine I have flung it aside forever!"

"It depends on yourself to assure your future career against any troublesome search," said Sorège placidly. "You have only to keep up your character and personality. Do at London as you did at

## IN LONDON

San Francisco, and you will be free from danger. What fear can you have of Tragomer here, where you are known by all your companions—your director, the public, the Americans who have been applauding you for two years, and who would all affirm, if need be, that you are really Miss Jenny Hawkins? There is only one being in the world who would not allow himself to be deceived by your metamorphosis, and in whose presence you would not be free from danger. But he will never appear again. We have buried him alive in a vault as safe as the one in which he would have been put had he died. Be calm, then; but summon up courage, as I know you can, when necessary. You are a thorough woman, Léa—capable of the highest generosity as well as of the basest infamy. I have guessed what you were, and that is why I loved you so passionately.”

“No, Jean,” said Léa sorrowfully. “The reason you loved me is that I loved Jacques, and you hated him. You say you know me. I, too, know you; and your soul is a black one. Oh! you are clever; you know how to conceal your real feelings. I have long been your dupe. You made me believe in your devotion and tenderness. But, finally, I saw clear into your mind, tho you so ingeniously concealed everything from me; and there I discovered treachery, jealousy, and cruelty. In sooth, Jacques has been unworthy, treacherous, and cowardly! But what of yourself, who have made use of these faults in his character to egg me on to ruin him? Who knows, too, whether you have not once more taken advantage of my credulity, and whether the unhappy fel-

## IN DEEP ABYSS

low was as guilty as you proved to me? I have no confidence in you, Sorège, now; for I have seen you at work, and I know what you are capable of."

Sorège's eyes, which had been lowered as usual, now darted a clear glance at the young woman, and the expression of crafty gentleness on his face suddenly disappeared. He stood up savagely, with decided mien, and in threatening tones said:

"What is that you are saying? You are in doubt, are you—perhaps remorse? Are you losing your senses? Do you forget under what conditions I intervened at a time when you were almost mad with terror? My dear Léa, you are not becoming ungrateful, are you? That would be very weak and foolish on your part. We can only escape from our embarrassment—for, do not forget, it will only be an embarrassment, not a danger—by remaining firmly united. The devil! I looked upon you as more courageous than that! Are you capable of letting go your hold, like a Frenchwoman, instead of holding on like a true Italian, as you are? And, yet, they know how to hate in your country; they know how to avenge themselves. It is blood, not water, that flows through their veins. Have you forgotten what Jacques had dared to do, and what the other actually did also?"

"No! I have not forgotten. Had I not had the memory of what I have suffered to sustain me I could not have lived. And, yet, I have spent terrible nights with the frightful picture of the dead woman before my eyes."

She had lowered her voice, and yet Sorège cast

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a rapid glance around as tho he wished to make certain that no one had heard. With a cat-like movement he went to the door, opened it noiselessly, looked into the next room, assured himself that it was unoccupied, and returned with the same supple, quiet step to the young woman:

"You must not be foolish," he said in gentle tones. "Come, my little Léa, you are not going to lose your head, are you? I am here to defend you, if necessary. If Tragomer torments you, I will undertake to bring him to his senses. Come here; think of nothing but your success, and look a little more cheerful. We do not see each other so often. . . . And you know how I love you."

Taking hold of her arm and approaching his lips, he passionately kissed her supple wrist and well-shaped arm. She roughly thrust him away.

"Come! No hypocrisy! Are you forgetting that you are to be married in a few weeks?"

He burst into a laugh.

"What does that prove? Surely you do not think, because I am marrying that banknote plant named Miss Harvey, that I do not love you? I am transacting a matter of business, my love. Surely you see that? When I am married, and very wealthy, you will readily forget the marriage in sharing the wealth."

Jenny Hawkins sat silent a moment; then, with serious and determined air, she said:

"Listen, Sorège; the time has come for mutual and frank explanations. We know too well what we are, both of us, to try to deceive ourselves use-



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lessly. You love me, true; but what a sad and shameful love! I submitted to you, for you held me under a thrall of death. You have been brutally fierce. Do you remember the first night spent in Boulogne when I escaped to England under the name of Jeanne Baud? You threatened and terrified me that night in a way that could never be told. Had I not yielded to your passion, you would have been capable, in your fury, of denouncing me before I should have had time to take the boat. Am I speaking the truth?"

He replied, impassive, with closed eyes and a cold smile on his face.

"In part, but you exaggerate. It is not absolutely indispensable for me to hear cries of pain uttered by a beautiful mouth to take pleasure in kissing it. Still, my dear Léa, just notice how lacking in finesse your reasoning is, when, after manifesting your intention to refuse me everything, you show me that you have understood what a degree of diabolical energy I am capable of reaching. Come, establish a little order in your ideas. If I am so dreadful as you have just said it is very wrong of you to defy me, for then you must be certain beforehand that I will either compel or ruin you."

This time they looked at each other boldly, like adversaries measuring their respective strength. But Léa was the first to lower her eyes, and whether from calculation or real submission, she said:

"Do not threaten me. You know I will endure anything rather than that. It was your brutality from the very first which set me against you. I do

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not ignore the services that you have rendered me, but you ought not to recall them to my mind in this harsh manner. If you were determined to make me resist you, you would not act otherwise, unless it is a return of your former ferocity which makes you caress me, as tigers do, with their claws."

She was now smiling, but the smile was trembling on her lips. Had Sorège raised his lowered eyelids, he would not have been pleased with Léa's look. But perhaps he saw it all the same, for he had strange faculties. He said:

"Very well, my dear. You are becoming more calm. I came this morning merely to speak to you of the persons it is possible you may have dealings with. I will call again to-night. Tavistock Street is well chosen; it is central, and yet not too noisy. You have shown your usual tact in your choice of such a quiet house."

Rising, he took up his hat, as tho about to withdraw. But, with him, the last moment was always the most important, and the last sentence the weightiest of all.

"Ah! I was forgetting to tell you the chief reason I had come to see you. Mr. Julius Harvey has invited a few friends to dinner the day after to-morrow. He would like you to come and sing during the evening."

Jenny Hawkins turned pale, and asked, in trembling tones:

"What friends are these? What is this snare you are setting for me? What terrible trial am I yet to go through?"

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He replied quietly:

"The decisive trial. After that, you will be mistress of your destiny; you will no longer have anything to fear. You may even do without me, if you like. For you will have proved to Tragomer and Marenval that you are Jenny Hawkins, and, for them, will never be any other than Jenny Hawkins. Is the risk not worth taking? Do not flinch; I will show you that I, at any rate, am the man you take me for. Will you come? I must give a reply to my father-in-law, and especially to my fiancée, who is burning with impatience to know you. She pretends, in her enthusiasm, that you are positively 'out of sight!' Dazzle her more than she anticipates, Léa; it will only be justice."

He laughed. She was stupefied at his boldness, but became at once more confident.

"Very well; I will come."

"Good! I will go at once and order the bracelet that Mr. Harvey will offer you. Altho a cowboy, he does things in style, and will think nothing of spending \$2,500 in ornamenting with diamonds and pearls the arm of Miss Jenny Hawkins for singing three short pieces before a small company of forty persons. Au revoir this evening."

Drawing her to him, he kissed her on the brow and silently glided out of the room. The prima donna composed her features, and sank down into an arm-chair, tired and sad.

"What a punishment! Have I not already paid only too dearly for my safety, at the cost of such slavery as this?"

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She leaned her head on her hand, and sank into a gloomy reverie. Her maid-servant, on coming to inform her mistress that lunch was ready, found her still in the same position, eyes fixed and lips set, recalling to mind all the sad memories of the past.

## Chapter II

### MOTHER AND SON MEET IN LONDON

AT the same hour, near London Bridge, two ladies, dressed in mourning and closely veiled, alighted from a hansom and looked around them, not without a certain feeling of uneasiness. The wharves of the Thames teemed with noisy activity; dock-laborers were engaged everywhere in unloading the steamers along the wharves. The stream flowed along between the black-keeled ships, and a never-ending line of cabs and omnibuses stretched along the Bridge. From the river edge appeared the Tower, somber and mysterious, and the entrance of St. Katherine's Docks, with its piles of merchandise, was visible.

Moored near the dock, a yacht, quite dwarfed by the immense ships all round, flew its three-colored emblem among the merchant flags of England. The elder of the two ladies, pointing out the small coquettish boat to her companion, said:

"There is the *Magic*. . . . We will go down to the dock."

Descending a flight of stone steps they reached the bank and made their way amid crowds of workmen, brokers, sailors, and beggars to the foot-bridge that led on to the yacht. On their approach a tall,

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dark-complexioned young man appeared at the gangway and advanced to meet them.

"Here is Monsieur de Tragomer," said the younger of the two ladies, hastily raising her veil, to obtain a better view.

The face of Mademoiselle de Fréneuse, free from the veil which had concealed it, now appeared: She hurried along her mother, who was trembling with emotion, and helped her to ascend the steps that led on to the deck.

"Welcome, ladies," said Christian, raising his hat; "your arrival is being eagerly awaited here."

Marie raised her eyes, as tho to make sure that these words did not mean more than they seemed to do. She saw the young man's handsome face, bronzed by a tropical sun and the open sea breezes, smiling at her, radiant and triumphant.

"Is he there?" she asked.

"Yes. In the saloon."

She was in front of the stairs, and held out her hand to him. He could not have said whether it was so that he might grasp it, or that he might help her to alight. But for the first time in many, many months Christian had the happiness of touching that hand, which, now offered to him, had once repulsed him so brusquely.

"Come, mother," said the young girl, as she led the way for Madame de Fréneuse.

They descended between decks, in an almost semi-obscurity. A door opened, a stifled cry was heard, and there, before them, just as they had seen him when he was happy, handsome, and young, they saw

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Jacques holding his arms out to them. Madame de Fréneuse, pale as death, stood there for a moment, motionless, devouring with her eyes this son whom she had imagined she would never see again; then, bursting into sobs, she buried her face in her hands, as tho afraid this delightful vision would vanish from her sight. She felt herself carried, rather than led, to an armchair, and, on reopening her eyes, she saw her son kneeling before her, looking up at her through his tears.

"Oh! my dear child, it is really you!" stammered the poor woman. "Is it possible? God has performed a miracle for us."

"Yes, my dear mother," said Jacques, gravely, "but these faithful friends of mine have put it into execution. We owe them a great deal, for it is not only my life they have saved, but also the honor of our name."

"How shall we pay the debt?"

"Oh! we need not speak of that so soon. Gratitude is sweet when addressed to a delicate and sensitive soul. If one wishes to pay such a debt one deprives oneself of a great joy. But reassure yourself, our debt, at any rate toward one of our friends, is of such a nature as can easily be paid."

Mademoiselle de Fréneuse blushed deeply at these words. Nevertheless, she did not turn aside her eyes, and Tragomer's heart was gladdened at seeing a smile play on her lips. She seemed never to tire of fondling and embracing Jacques. Marenval, leaning against the bulkhead, stood looking on at this affecting scene without attempting to restrain

## MOTHER AND SON MEET IN LONDON

his emotion. For two months he had been looking forward to this moment, when he could bring the son to his mother's arms, and thought of what a delicious joy it would be to him. He had often said to Tragomer: "It will be an extraordinary scene!" Afterward he was obliged to confess that he was more deeply moved than he had expected, and that he, Marenval, a skeptical Parisian and blasé, had wept like a child. Leaning over toward Christian, he whispered in his ear:

"Let us leave them together. We will return shortly. My eyes are smarting, and I should be glad to go on deck a while."

They left the room without the two ladies, preoccupied in their happiness, noticing their withdrawal. They were too deeply engaged in indemnifying themselves for all the love and tenderness of which they had been deprived during the two years past.

"You are sure, my dear child, that you run no danger here?"

"No, my dear mother, on condition I do not show myself. Had my enemies any suspicion of my presence they might denounce me. But this state of things will not last long. In a few days we shall no longer have any precautions to take in seeing one another."

"How pale and thin you are!"

"Oh! I have changed considerably to my advantage the last two months. Now my mustache and hair have grown, and I am not too unlike myself. If you had seen me when I escaped, you would have pitied me far more."



## IN DEEP ABYSS

"Have you suffered greatly?"

"Yes, mother, but not for nothing. Imprisoned in that tomb, with almost a certainty of never leaving it, I retired within myself, examined my past life, and judged it severely. I have been brought to think that I was paying, harshly perhaps, but still justly, for the mistakes I had made. A supreme favor of fate had placed near me a lovable priest, the chaplain of the penitentiary, who interested himself in my unhappy lot, on seeing me so different from my companions in trouble. He made it his task to reform me. From being savage and untractable, he made me calm and resigned. He kindled in my soul the belief of my innocent childhood, showed me that Heaven was a supreme refuge, and that in prayer was to be found a lasting consolation. For long, weary days, occupied solely by rough and tedious work, during interminable nights of burning fever, had I not had the thought of God to calm and soothe my spirit, I should either have killed myself or gone mad. On arriving I had determined on suicide. I had just spent sixty-five days locked in a cage with the scum of the human race, hearing nothing but infamous execrations, obscene songs, and projects of revenge; all this beneath the mouth of a cannon loaded with grapeshot. Life seemed to me impossible, and I had made up my mind to escape from it by death."

"Unhappy child!" groaned Madame de Fréneuse, laying her trembling hands on her son's head. "A suicide!"

"Oh! no, mother; it was all in vain. From the

## MOTHER AND SON MEET IN LONDON

very first day my companions conceived a hatred toward me. They looked upon me as a bourgeois, an aristocrat. For even among those abject and depraved men there is a hierarchy, and it is the basest and most infamous who are the most respected. Seeing me so different from themselves, they were convinced that I was a spy—a 'black sheep,' as they said in their slang—and one day when for a few moments the attendant had left the shed where we were toiling in the full glare of the tropical sun, five of them threw themselves upon me. Their plan was simple enough. We were dragging a heavy cast-iron roller over the road, to crush the stones with which it had just been paved. Their crime was to be a simple accident. It was to be supposed that I had slipped; the roller, drawn along by the rest, could not be brought to a sudden stoppage, and I was to be crushed to death beneath it."

"The monsters!"

"Yes, mother. That was what I thought when I saw myself seized and flung to the ground, and heard them encourage one another, with frightful shrieks of laughter, to crush me beneath this ponderous machine. I had only to let them alone, my prayers would have been heard, and I should have been rid of my miserable life. But a feeling of revolt against the atrocity of these men, an instinct of self-preservation came over me in a moment, and instead of submitting to this fearful fate, I vigorously defended myself. I was still strong despite the privations I had endured, and in a trice I had felled two of my assailants. The rest, astonished at my resistance,

## IN DEEP ABYSS

again flung themselves on me. I struck down another of them with a blow of my chain. On hearing the scuffle, the attendant came running back. A single glance told him what had happened, he placed his hand to his revolver, and soon order was restored. The director was informed of the matter, and the following day I was removed from the frightful surroundings in which I had been living, and placed in the offices of the penitentiary. There, tho I had no greater liberty, I could at least suffer alone without being made a laughing-stock, and could pray without being insulted. It was then that my ideas gradually changed, and that, in the silence of my seclusion, I became another man. All I had passionately loved and sought after; pleasure, luxury, human vanity, now seemed to me utterly worthless. I, whose only thought had been to speed the flying hours in pleasure, now began to reflect seriously. All the pernicious futility of my past existence became apparent to me. There were other things to do in this world, besides engaging in a hunt for distraction. Other men suffered for lack of daily food, and passed their lives in toiling for a paltry pittance, and their workshops, sheds, and mines were also bagnios. These, however, had not deserved such an unhappy lot. Even a small proportion of the money I formerly squandered away so foolishly would have enabled me to lessen their poverty, lighten their burden of toil, and give them some measure of happiness. I determined, if ever I left my prison, to devote the remainder of my life to the poor and

## MOTHER AND SON MEET IN LONDON

lowly, in memory of what I had suffered myself. I imparted my thoughts to that most devoted priest who had voluntarily come to live among these criminals in the hope of converting and saving them. He encouraged me, became my friend, and after a time was convinced that I was innocent. It was a great relief, my dear mother, to hear these words falling for the first time from a human mouth, 'I believe that you are not guilty.' It was the representative of God on earth who thus extolled me in my own eyes. I was overcome with gratitude, and I made a vow to devote myself to the service of this God in whose name the work of pity and love was being effected."

"What! Jacques, you wish. . . ."

"To become a priest, yes, mother. It will be an act of wisdom as well as an act of repentance. Do not misunderstand me. In this world, even tho I succeed in bringing about the triumph of truth, and in proving my innocence, I shall none the less be branded with infamy. A stain like the one inflicted on me can never be completely washed away. In spite of everything, my friends will treat me coldly, will hold out their hands without a word. The blemish will remain just the same. I shall have to suffer from continually seeing that I am only welcomed under tolerance, and that any sympathy shown me will be forced. Therefore it will be more dignified on my part to withdraw from a society the doors of which would only be opened to me through charity. My pride would have counseled such a refuge for me, even tho my convic-

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tions had not forced me to this conclusion. I will stay near you to make you forget the grief I have caused you, and my life will be spent in paying my debt of tenderness. You will recover your son once again, and who knows whether, after some time, comparing what I shall be with what I was in the past, you may not be brought to think that Providence seemed bent on my ruin the better to save me!"

"Oh, no! my dear child. However sweet your promises, I shall never be able to recall without shuddering the terrible nightmare of the last two years. Look how my face is wrinkled, how gray my hair has become, and see how my hands tremble. In twenty-four months I have aged a score of years. Now I look like a septuagenarian. Have I, too, committed great sins that I have been so heavily punished? For the chastisement you accept has been extended to your sister and your mother, and that is not right!"

Jacques's features contracted, and he looked up with sorrowful eyes.

"Yes, and it is that very fact which will make me implacable against those whose hate has followed me. I mean the fact that the innocent have suffered along with the guilty. I was wandering, just now, mother, when speaking of pity and charity. The time has not yet come for me to be helpful and indulgent. I have to condemn and to punish first."

"Are you certain to succeed in this?"

"Those who are guilty can not escape me; they are in my power; my appearance alone is sufficient

## MOTHER AND SON MEET IN LONDON

to confound them. Their sole security is in their certainty that I shall never return. Still, though acquainted with their crimes, I am ignorant of the reasons they have had for committing them, and it is in these reasons especially that my justification will lie. I must prove, mother, not only that I have been unjustly condemned, but also who committed the murder and for what reason. This is the work to which I will devote my final energies as a man. Afterward I will be all indulgence and gentleness."

"Then that wretched woman," said Madame de Fréneuse, "for whom you had committed so many follies, and whom you are accused of having killed, is living?"

"Yes, she is here in London. Last night she was singing at Covent Garden. In company with our friends, I was present at the performance. Seated in an obscure box, painted like an actor, so that no one could recognize me, I passed the evening in Léa Pérelli's presence. Tragomer was not mistaken. It is indeed Léa herself. But tokens of her remorse are visible on her face. In spite of her dazzling beauty, she suffers, I am certain. She must have been seized with some indescribable outburst to commit the atrocious crime for which I have been held responsible. But I have no doubt whatever that she is sorry for it. Who knows, perhaps she may be disposed to atone for it! I shall soon know everything, for I must take some decisive steps in the matter. On the interview I shall have with her will depend the success of our enterprise."

"Would no other influence than yours have any

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effect on this woman?" asked Mademoiselle de Fréneuse. "Would she not be accessible to pity? Suppose I went to beseech her?"

"No, it is impossible. Such a course would put her on her guard, and we might obtain no result. I well understand, my dear Marie, that you are afraid for my sake, and that you would like to prevent me exposing myself to risk. You imagine that Léa, bewildered at my appearance, is capable of creating a scandal and causing my arrest. Do not fear anything of the kind. She is far too brave a woman to have recourse to such vulgar methods. The dispute between us will be entirely of a moral nature, and I dread neither treachery nor violence. Oh, I should not have the same assurance had I to deal with our excellent friend Sorège!"

"Ah! the wretch!"

"Yes, he deserves the deepest hatred and scorn. But wait, we must be patient. Let us find out exactly what part he has played in the drama, and he shall be punished, I promise you, for all the suffering he has caused us."

The expression on Jacques's countenance changed; he sat down between his mother and sister, smilingly, and with a look of happy relief began to speak.

## Chapter III

### THE LOVE OF MARIE AND TRAGOMER

"ENOUGH of these atrocious deeds, and of those who have committed them," said Jacques; "let us cleanse our thoughts and soften our hearts. Tell me what you are doing, how you are spending your time here in London. I do not want you to lead sad and sequestered lives now. No longer any black dresses or dark veils. Here is my little sister as grave as a grandmother. Will her mind never reopen to anything but the stern and somber side of life, and will her heart always remain cold and icy?"

Marie blushed and turned her glance aside.

"Tragomer has confessed to me," continued Jacques. "I know his weakness as well as your severity toward him. But months of perseverance have atoned for a momentary abandonment. It is to him that I owe my presence here between you two, my dear mother and sister. We must not forget this. You will never know—I myself do not even know—how much intelligence and courage he has put into my rescue. I will tell you the little I do know, and that will suffice to fill you with admiration and gratitude for my two rescuers, Marenval and Christian. I believe Marenval will find his



## IN DEEP ABYSS

reward in his own satisfaction itself. He has acted like a hero. But how shall we repay Christian if my sister does not take the debt upon herself?"

Mademoiselle de Fréneuse raised her eyes and, with a charming smile, said:

"I knew I could reward him for the risk he was about to run for our sake. He knew, too, that I would repay his fidelity. Still, I will not insult him by thinking that he has done all with the sole object of satisfying me. I believe there was as much friendship as love in his devotion. Do not be anxious. I will fulfil all demands in due time."

"May I call him? It would only be right to speak a few words of encouragement to him."

Mademoiselle de Fréneuse nodded assent. Jacques pressed the knob of an electric bell. It was not the steward who entered, but instead Marenval and Tragomer, the masters of the yacht. Standing in the saloon under the sharp light coming through the copper-encased portholes, Mademoiselle de Fréneuse, slightly pale, watched Christian approach. Had she loved him before repulsing him so harshly? This proud, grave girl was not one of those who lightly tell the secrets of their hearts. Just now she looked steadily at him, and Tragomer, standing before her, with his giant form and arms worthy of a Hercules, trembled with emotion.

"I wish to speak to you, Monsieur de Tragomer," said Marie, in clear, decisive tones. "Six months ago, on leaving France, you gave me your hand and I placed mine in it. On your side, it was a request of me to forget my troubles; on mine, a consent to

## THE LOVE OF MARIE AND TRAGOMER

this. Perhaps that was not all you wished for; still, it was all I could grant you at that time. Since then you have acquired a great claim on our gratitude. My brother pretends that I alone can suitably thank you for the affectionate devotion you have shown him. I am not ungrateful. I thank you from the bottom of my heart, and if I can give you any proof of my gratitude, speak; I am ready to grant you whatever you wish."

Tragomer's eyelids quivered, his lips trembled. He wished to speak, but could not. As he stood there motionless and dumb, his breast heaving with an emotion for which he could find no expression in words, Mademoiselle de Fréneuse again held out her dainty fingers and said softly:

"This hand you asked me for on your departure; you are now back; do you wish me to offer it to you?"

Tragomer took it, and, bowing as tho before an idol, pressed it to his lips and said:

"Yes. Forever!"

"Keep it then. But, remember, it can only belong to you when the name of the one who now offers it is free from every stain. I will be your wife, Christian, only when you can marry me with the approval of all."

"Be assured, Marie, and you also, madame, that moment will come speedily."

They were happy; Marenval was exultant. He took pride in and credit for all this joy. The time passed rapidly, and day was already declining when Madame de Fréneuse and her daughter took leave of Jacques. While landing from the yacht they

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passed a man of distinguished mien, whom it was easy to recognize as a Frenchman by his general appearance. He stopped to allow them to pass, bowed, and stepped on to the foot-bridge. Doubtless he was expected, for Marenval, who was walking to and fro on the deck, came eagerly to meet him, and, after a vigorous handshake, said:

"Come this way, my dear lawyer."

"Hush!" said the visitor with a smile. "No name or title, please, my dear friend."

And, following his guide, he descended. It was Pierre de Vesin. Doubtless it was not the first time he had been on board the *Magic*, for he followed without a mistake the pathway which led along the water-tight bulkhead to the stern. There, in a small smoking-room next to the dining-room, he found Tragomer and Jacques. After shaking hands he sat down and said:

"I have just met your mother and sister. They appeared delighted, poor souls! It was, indeed, time the prospect began to look brighter for them. But things are progressing satisfactorily, and I have brought you good news. The detective set to watch Jenny Hawkins has arrived. He has been brought into relations with Inspector Melville, the head of the English detective service, a man of great abilities, who will direct all operations. The result of the appeal for a summons against Jenny Hawkins is not very satisfactory. . . . If we look upon the singer as American, it is extremely difficult to arrest her in England for a crime committed in France—on which, too, a verdict has

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already been pronounced. If we call her by her real name, Léa Pérelli, she becomes Italian, and that brings about fresh complications. If she were in France, it would be simple enough; a mere summons to appear would be sufficient. Here, in England, it becomes very inconvenient. . . . There is no country in the world in which liberty has more securities. . . . It amounts to license. This is the land of promise for villains of all kinds."

"Well! What will your detective do?" asked Tragomer.

"Keep a strict watch on Sorège and the singer and be in readiness to intervene if necessary. In any case, furnish us with minute particulars as to what our opponents will do. I myself am on a holiday, and am in this matter acting only as a private individual—your friend, nothing more. I have left my title and functions behind in Paris. The Keeper of the Seals, whom I called on with the Attorney-General, is extremely interested in the issue of this affair. He is a red-hot Liberal, who would look upon the fact that amends for a great injustice were to take place under his ministry as a personal glory. We have for some time been too much annoyed with questionable revisions, so that now we shall be only too delighted to try a hopeful one. The whole world would thus be made to see that we are inspired by a pure, disinterested love of truth and justice. That is what our chief said—in other words—and he at once arranged with the detective service that everything should be carried out expeditiously and secretly."

## IN DEEP ABYSS

"But what did the Minister say of what took place at Nouméa?" asked Marenval, rubbing his hands together.

"My dear friend, that is called a 'case in reserve.' It has not been put in question. The report on the escape has reached Paris. But it is impossible to raise up anything against you there. The precautions taken by Tragomer to disguise his identity have deceived the administration. According to the governor, it was an English vessel which effected the escape, and afterward steamed straight for Australia. If you refrain from idle boasts about the abduction, you will be free from all responsibility. Once the proofs of Monsieur de Fréneuse's innocence are in our hands, all he will have to do will be to give himself up as a prisoner and allow matters to take their regular course. But we must have material proofs; that is the main point. Everything depends on the production of such. If you do not obtain the confession of the real culprit, Monsieur de Fréneuse's position becomes very serious, and he will have to set out for South America if he wishes to live free from any possible prosecution. To tell you the truth, I have never known a case so full of difficulty and danger. Everything is irregular, whichever way one turns; regulations and laws have been outrageously violated. Still, I quite acknowledge that it is impossible to find any other issue from the difficulty."

"Have you seen Sorège since your arrival in London?" asked Tragomer.

"I was dining with him and Julius Harvey yester-

## THE LOVE OF MARIE AND TRAGOMER

day. You were the subject of conversation, and Sorège showed himself magnificently impudent. He extolled you to the skies."

"Patience! He will change his tune before long. I am keeping him for myself; he has an account to settle with me for all his treachery. I intend to tell him, once for all, what I think of him. But perhaps he will find himself so compromised, in company with Miss Jenny Hawkins, that the only thing to do will be to leave him to explain matters with your agent."

Pierre de Vesin shook his head.

"Ah! He is too cunning for you to succeed in subduing him so easily. He has so much at stake that he will defend himself vigorously. The question with him is 'To be or not to be,' as Sir Henry Irving says so well. If he wins, he possesses Julius Harvey's millions, without counting the huge satisfaction of having flouted us all in fine style. If he loses. . . . Ah! my friends, then he will be dangerous. A tiger at bay, certain of his fate, will be bent on having a few victims. . . . At that moment be on your guard!"

"I have killed tigers," said Tragomer quietly. "You bowl them over like rabbits."

"You underestimate Sorège; he is infinitely more to be feared," Vesin replied.

Jacques had listened to this discussion without uttering a word. He appeared absorbed in thought. One might have imagined he was not listening. Still, he appeared to have heard Christian's words, and softly laying his hand on his friend's arm, spoke.

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"No one has any right," he said, "to dispose of Sorège without my consent. He belongs to none other than myself. I will not even hand him over to justice. I will give him an opportunity of avoiding disgrace, and thus extend to him that pity he would not bestow on me. If he is really so base as Tragomer suspects, I reserve to myself the right to judge and punish him."

Tragomer bowed his head in token of assent.

"Very good! That is only right. I have no objection to make."

"As for Léa Pérelli," continued Jacques, "you will only have to wait till to-morrow to know what part she has played in this matter."

Vesin and Marenval had arisen from their seats.

"Will you dine with me?" asked the magistrate.

"Certainly. Just give me time to put on a coat and I will be with you. We will leave these two young men 'en tête-à-tête.'"

"Where are you going?" asked Tragomer.

"To the Savoy. That is where one can dine best."

"And most expensively!"

"You will dine no better than on board."

"You may be right," said the lawyer, with a laugh. "But do not forget that, ethically, judges ought not to dine at the same table as prisoners."

"Good-by, then," said Marenval.

"We shall meet again to-morrow at Julius Harvey's dinner party."

## Chapter IV

### CORNERED

THE squatter was living in a very fine hotel in Grosvenor Square. He had an establishment in London, as in Paris, and every year his daughter took him to England for a couple of months. Often one or both of his sons accompanied them, as they preferred life in England, where they were under more congenial surroundings than in France. Continental morals and ideas, customs and tastes, were insupportable to them. These robust young men could not exist in the narrow limits of conventional life. They would often feel inclined to take off their dress-coats in the middle of a *soirée*, and thrust their white cravats in their pockets. The open-air English life compensated them for the gloomy in-door life of the salons.

On leaving a dinner, or after a performance at the theater, they would take a row on the Thames, or make a journey of a hundred and fifty miles by rail, to attend a fox-hunt. Then, after breaking a few oars, or almost riding to death a few horses, they would return, toned up, and in the best of spirits. Their father envied them, but he was restrained by Miss Harvey, who would not allow him to do all he wished.



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The American society of London, welcomed as favorably by the English gentry as by Parisian society, rivals in luxury the most aristocratic families of England. They fling money about in London with even more lordly abandon than in Paris. One might say that these parvenus, with scarcely a hundred years of national existence, are bent on amazing the Old World by an exhibition of their extraordinary vitality. The English, tho jealous of this output of strength and realization of power, can not help being kindly disposed toward these ungrateful children who turned upon their mother. They do not forget that the same blood flows through their veins. And, like indulgent grandparents, they pass lightly over these American escapades until the time comes when with their practical common sense they will understand that it is to their interest to encourage them. Then the Anglo-Saxon alliance, in both New and Old Worlds, will be an accomplished fact. The American eagle and the British lion will have common interests and bonds.

For the time being, the relations between the two nations are cultivated by dinners and other entertainments given by millionaires prior to alliances between the descendants of the Conquest and the cattle-breeders or mine-owners. The statistics of the marriages which have introduced the young ladies of Chicago, New York, or Philadelphia into the most aristocratic English families are very interesting. These tend to show that England has drained America of more than a hundred million dollars in marriage portions.

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When the matrimonial mart is public, the exchange of friendly relations between countries that produce husbands and those that produce wives becomes remarkably easy. Accordingly, the Harvey family had one foot in France and the other in England. But France was winning, since the Count de Sorège had been accepted as fiancé. Still, since Tragomer had arrived on board the *Magic*, and had called on the squatter, Sorège's prestige seemed to have lessened. The two youngest brothers, Philip and Edward, were just then in London, and their enthusiasm for Christian's athletic figure was very pronounced. The cowboy Philip had bluntly informed his sister that she ought to have chosen such a man as the Breton nobleman.

"He is like one of ourselves; can ride as well as old Pew, our riding-master; can walk without becoming tired; knows how to handle a rifle and a knife, and has fished on the great lakes. . . . Why, with your money, Maud, did you not find a strong, sturdy fellow like Count Christian, instead of hunting out this gloomy-looking owl of a Sorège? Since Julius Harvey and sons paid the dowry you wished, you ought to have chosen the very best."

"Still, Philip," Miss Maud had replied, "the best man on the prairie is not the best in a salon. Since I have made up my mind to live in Europe, perhaps it is preferable that I marry a quiet man rather than some reckless dare-devil like yourself or my other brothers."

"It is your concern, Maud, so you must follow your own inclination. But if you have any thought

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of your future children, it would be more to your interest to marry a good fellow like Tragomer than a stock-fish like Sorège. Still, it is your own affair!"

"Indeed!" said the young girl. "There is nothing to prove that M. de Tragomer has any thought of me. Besides, as he told me himself, his affections are already engaged."

"In that case, we must let the matter drop."

The infatuation of her brothers for the simple and proud, tho sturdy, Christian had certainly had its influence on Miss Maud, for during the week that the *Magic* had been moored in the Thames, she had boarded it twice, and had invited Christian and Marenval to dine with her father. Besides, she met the two Frenchmen almost every morning in Hyde Park, where, accompanied by her brothers, she went for a ride, at such a slow pace that as long as it lasted these centaurs were in a state of lamentable depression. Nothing less than a good game of cricket at Lord's restored the two young savages to their normal condition. Tragomer handled a bat with a vigor which had contributed in no slight degree to keep him in the good graces of Maud's brothers.

The evening before Mademoiselle and Madame de Fréneuse had come on board the yacht Marenval and Tragomer, on taking their usual constitutional along the Serpentine, had met Miss Maud on foot, followed by her carriage and footman.

"Where are your brothers, Miss Maud?" said Christian, after shaking hands. "Have they left you?"

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"They are at the Archers' Club, watching a very interesting match, it appears. Shall we continue our walk?"

"Yes, if you will allow us to accompany you."

Accordingly they took up positions on either side of the young girl, walking in step with her. After a momentary silence, Christian said tentatively:

"Do you remember, Miss Maud, a conversation we had about six months ago on the evening your father did me the honor of introducing me to you?"

"Yes, quite well. I have thought of it since with special interest. We were speaking of your former friend, Jacques de Fréneuse, and what you told me keenly impressed me. You seemed so certain of the poor fellow's innocence that I have often wondered what could be done to ascertain the truth."

"That evening you pointed out to me the course to take," resumed Christian, with a smile. "You even found great fault with me because I made no attempt on behalf of my friend. 'For my part,' you exclaimed, 'had one of my brothers been unjustly condemned, no obstacle should prevent me from attempting to bring about his rescue.' You were very angry with me. Luckily, you have since modified your opinion, and our relations have suffered nothing from this first impression."

Miss Harvey looked fixedly at Christian, and said in decisive tones:

"Why do you bring back that subject, since it was not favorable to you? I know you well enough now to understand that you have some reason for doing so. Have you learned anything fresh concerning

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your friend? Perhaps you have obtained certain proof of his innocence?"

Tragomer continued walking with bowed head, and without looking at the young girl.

"May I speak to you in full confidence, Miss Harvey? Can the women of your country be discreet when requested? If so, they possess a great superiority over the women of Europe, who are incapable of resisting a temptation to speak, and who would hang their best friends for the pleasure of letting loose what they have on the tip of their tongues."

"The women of America in this respect are men," said Miss Harvey. "You may entrust them with a secret; they would die rather than betray it. We are still savages, do not forget; but we possess the virtues as well as the failings of savages."

"Good! Then I will have confidence in you, and will impart my plans. . . . I see from Marenval's face that he would rather I were more reserved, but never mind, I will take the risk. . . ."

"Do so, my dear friend," said Cyprien, "but begin by telling Miss Harvey of the consequences our enterprise may have concerning a certain person with whom she is on very intimate terms."

Maud stopped suddenly, and turned pale.

"Are you speaking of M. de Sorège?"

Tragomer nodded:

"Marenval has done well to mention this at the outset. You see how troubled you are, Miss Harvey, and how hazardous it is for me to oppose your sincerity to your interest."

The blood rushed back to the cheeks of the young

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American girl. She continued her walk, and said, in decisive tones:

"Then it is really M. de Sorège who is implicated in the matter in question? Do not imagine it is in my nature to cherish illusions concerning him. What kind of a woman should I be were I to refuse to know the truth regarding a man whose name I am about to take, if the truth could be known? If he has been guilty of a mean act, will he be the less guilty because I am to marry him? To close one's eyes so as not to see, and to do so wilfully, is to imitate the ostrich, which, by burying its head in sand, imagines it avoids impending danger. M. de Sorège is my fiancé. He is neither rich nor talented, nor even intellectual; he has nothing but his name. If that name is not free from stain, I would not share it under any consideration."

This was uttered in tones as dry and sharp as the lash of a whip. There was no doubting the young girl's sincerity. Her frank, open character was visible in her looks.

"Well, here is the truth, since you wish to know it. Instead of taking a sea-voyage to Egypt and Syria, Marenval and I crossed the Suez Canal, reached the Indian Ocean, passed over to Batavia and crossed to New Caledonia. Under an assumed name, and armed with forged testimonials, I landed. I saw Jacques de Fréneuse, and the following day Marenval and I rescued him by force."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Miss Harvey, violently excited. "What! M. Marenval and you! Frenchmen! gentlemen of birth and position? You actu-

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ally did that? Oh! if Edward and Philip only knew it, they would be wild with enthusiasm!"

"Hush! They must know nothing whatever about it," interrupted Tragomer, gently.

"So you have brought back your poor friend?"

"He is on board our ship."

"On the Thames?"

"Facing the docks. His mother and sister are going to see him to-morrow. They have arrived secretly in London. We have carefully concealed them, for their presence here would awaken suspicion, and we can succeed in our enterprise only by acting discreetly."

"How happy these dear ladies will be? Ah! How I should like to witness their joy? This adventure intensely interests me. Have you really traveled thousands of miles through friendship for M. de Fréneuse? . . . You, Parisians as you are, have left your city, your pleasures, your regular routine, to travel so far and to risk your lives?"

"Marenval indeed risked his," said Christian. "He was within an ace of being killed by a pistol-shot. Had you seen him at that moment, you would not have forgotten it soon!"

Miss Harvey raised her hand in her enthusiasm, and, in tones quivering with excitement, which stirred the suppliant to the depths of his being, said: "Well, I never thought you would have become a hero! The French are capable of anything! But you do not tell me what *you* were doing all this time, M. de Tragomer. . . ."

"He," replied Marenval, "was in the water with

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Jacques, supporting and encouraging him as they swam, beneath a hail of revolver-shots and in a sea swarming with sharks. . . . Yes, Miss Harvey, it was a lively time! We were compelled to sink the revenue-cutter so as to stop pursuit. But we did not fire a single shot, even in self-defense, for, being Frenchmen, we could not forget we were dealing with our own countrymen. . . . Ah! it was indeed a narrow escape for us! I can assure you that at night, when on board the yacht, with engines at full speed, we heartily relished our food!"

"Your friend was there, saved by you. How great your joy must have been and how deep his gratitude!"

"He was delirious, but recovered by degrees, and after comparing notes, we have been enabled to obtain proof that he is innocent."

Miss Harvey reflected for a moment, and then added gravely:

"And, according to you, M. de Sorège knew that he was innocent?"

"We have no doubt of it."

"Will you prove it?"

"That will be the evident result of the test we are about to make, for which we need your assistance. This is how the matter stands. The day after tomorrow we are to dine with your father and a few of his friends. . . . To-day, this very morning, express a wish that the Jenny Hawkins now singing at Covent Garden be invited to attend after the dinner. Sorège knows her, he will act as intermediary, if you insist, and will induce the prima-donna to come."



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"Very well! I will do as you say. But afterward?"

"That is all. We will attend to the rest. Be very careful, however, not to utter a single unnecessary word to Sorège. You wish to amuse your friends, you have heard the beautiful Jenny at the theater, and you would like to have her singing in your salon. If he raises any objection, insist, but do not show your guns."

"Leave it all to me."

"I must also ask you for an invitation for a young Englishman, a friend of ours, who will call for a cup of tea during the evening if you authorize him to do so."

"His name?"

"For all the others, Sir Herbert Carlton. For you, Jacques de Frèneuse."

"Heavens! What is this you are plotting?" asked Miss Maud uneasily.

"You will see. As the matter interests you, you shall be present at one of the most important episodes. You have driven me to risk everything to save my friend, Miss Harvey; you must now help me to attain my object, whatever may come of it."

"In this I will help you loyally, M. de Tragomer, and if any one has anything to reproach himself for, the worse for him. Above all, it must be our business to defend honest people."

"When Jacques de Frèneuse makes his appearance," said Christian, "study carefully Jenny Hawkins and Sorège. However self-possessed they may be, their astonished looks and blanched faces will be-

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tray their secret. You have seen 'Macbeth' played, Miss Harvey; and you know how terrified the crowned assassin appears as he sees his victim's ghost arise in the midst of the feast. Watch the singer and your fiancé; you will have the scene repeated. But we have to deal with very clever people. Under almost similar circumstances, Jenny Hawkins retained admirable sang-froid. Perhaps she will try to slip away. Under no pretext allow her to communicate with Sorège before you or to leave the salon. From the moment Jacques de Fréneuse is in the presence of his opponents, it will be for him to combat them, without help, and in his own way; you will have only to prevent their avoiding him."

"I will do as you say, I give you my word."

"Very good. Now we must separate till to-morrow."

Miss Harvey entered her carriage, and the two Frenchmen continued their walk, admiring the elegance of the equipages which were entering the park, as tho they had nothing whatever to preoccupy their minds.

The Harvey mansion was a beautiful dwelling built in Louis XVI. style, regardless of expense, by the Duke of Somerset, and paid for by the American. The furniture and interior appointments was luxurious. Miss Maud had had the good taste to preserve the former decoration of the salons, which were altogether in light tints, with convoluted piers, overhung with beautiful cameo pictures. The dining-room, splendidly ornamented with a massive mantelshelf, in the screen of which was framed a picture

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by Gainsborough, had a seating capacity for forty guests.

That evening, after the ladies had left the table, about a dozen gentlemen, Christian and Marenval among them, were, according to custom, doing honor to the liquors. The young cowboys, ill at ease in the black coats which encased their sturdy frames, made amends for the restraint imposed on them by society by taking a few drinks of whisky. The Frenchmen, since the beginning of the dinner, had scarcely touched their glasses. Julius Harvey, who was very careful in his diet, on account of the gout, which had already threatened him, scarcely did justice to the repast. Sorège was engaged in what appeared a deeply interesting conversation with George Saligman, the great promoter of gold-mines on the European market. It was ten o'clock, and the atmosphere of the dining-room was already becoming heavy, when Julius said to his guests:

"If you feel inclined to smoke, let us leave the room, for my daughter will certainly be coming soon to ask us to adjourn to the salon."

"Tragomer and I will come at once, if you will allow us," said Marenval.

Sorège raised his head, but made no attempt to follow his compatriots. His plan of conduct was already decided upon, and he was not a man to modify it. So long as Jenny Hawkins had not arrived, there was nothing to fear. He could accordingly allow himself a respite, and reserve his tactics until such time as he could make use of them advantageously. Marenval and Christian, crossing a conser-

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vatory filled with the finest tropical plants, and in the midst of which was the marble basin of a fountain into which flowed a stream of limpid water from an ivy-covered rock, entered the salon.

In the brilliancy of electric light the ladies, in full evening-dress, grouped round Miss Maud, offered a most charming picture. A few young American girls, with complexions like fresh carnations, rather heavy chins, light hair, broad shoulders, and long waists, were chattering to one another. The object of their conversation was the prima-donna, whose expected presence offered Julius Harvey's guests an attraction quite out of the ordinary. A few of them had heard her in America, others had just been applauding her at Covent Garden. All knew her, tho none had seen her in private life. The artiste's great reputation, the woman's great beauty, made her appearance in Miss Harvey's salon an event altogether sensational.

The arrival of Marenval and Tragomer was opportune. In Julius's American circle these Frenchmen were well received. They were known to be travelers, rich and amiable, and so everybody felt disposed to pardon them for not being of Anglo-Saxon descent. Miss Gower was relating a visit she had paid the previous week to the castle of Craig-y-Nos, Madame Patti's home, and she had attracted the attention of her audience.

"Just imagine. There is a theater where whole operas can be played. Is not that fine? Last week they played a ballet in which the diva took the principal rôle. . . ."

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"And yet she possesses the finest voice in the world!"

"No one could form any idea of the luxury indulged in there. The guests find riding and carriage horses placed at their disposal. Those who are fond of fishing can take to the lake or to the river; for those who prefer hunting, there are the woods and the open plain. Everything is on a truly royal scale! . . . "

"Are not artists the kings of the universe nowadays? They are never dethroned or hunted down with guns or insulted in the press. All kinds of favor, praise, and homage are lavished on them. Their civil lists are never put in question. When they grow old they receive universal honor, and when they die their funeral cortège is accompanied by a nation in mourning. These artists are indeed to be envied! And what have they given the populace in exchange for all this?"

A voice full of irony replied:

"Scarcely anything—their genius!"

All turned round to see who had spoken. It was Pierre de Vesin who had just entered the room. The lawyer, with a smile, walked up to Miss Maud and kissed her hand; then he bowed to the graceful group of ladies, and, leaning against the mantel-piece, said:

"The scene just pictured is a very pretty one; but it has a companion tableau, which must also be exhibited. In the artistic career, as in every other, there is a considerable amount of happiness; still, while some artists end in opulence and glory, others

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disappear in misery and oblivion, like a star which has long shone forth in the firmament and then darkens and dies out. You have had Garrick, who left millions to his heirs and was buried in Westminster Abbey. We have had Frederic Lemaitre, who died in debt, and now lies beneath a humble stone paid for by his last admirers. Do not envy the destiny of artists. They suffer, even in their triumph. The brilliancy which falls on some is largely compensated for by the bitter sorrow which befalls numberless others. Taking everything into consideration, they give much more than they receive, and if you were to place in a balance the artist's talent on the one hand and the applause and money of the spectators on the other, it would certainly be the talent which would weigh the heavier."

"You are quite right," said Miss Harvey. "In America they unharness the horses from Sarah Bernhardt's carriage! . . ."

The conversation was interrupted by the entry of the smokers and the master of the house. Some one, carrying a quantity of music under his arm, showed himself at the entrance of the salon. Julius leaned over to his daughter:

"Doubtless it is the accompanist. Now our star will not be long in appearing."

Miss Maud was already approaching the musician, and conducted him toward the piano, which occupied one corner of the salon. A few guests had arrived, and about fifty persons were present, grouped in small, congenial circles. It was the élite of the American colony. The millions of all those assem-

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bled that evening in Julius Harvey's mansion would have sufficed to pay the debt of a European state. There were railway kings, cattle and silver kings, without reckoning petroleum and other princes—a whole Gotha of mammoth industry and commerce and successful finance.

Marenval, Vesin, and Tragomer had taken up a position apart from the rest. They were sitting in the recess of a window, between the entrance-door and the piano. Nothing of what was about to take place in the drawing-room could possibly escape them. Sorège was chatting, with the utmost serenity, to the beautiful Duchess of Blenheim. A door, however, had just opened and a valet's voice was heard above the murmur of the conversation, uttering three words which occasioned an immediate silence:

“Miss Jenny Hawkins.”

There on the threshold, tall, elegant, and proud, looking slightly pale, but with a smile on her face, the singer appeared. She wore a dress of white damask, ornamented with gold lace. She wore no jewels beyond a single pearl necklace, and a diamond comb which sparkled in her chestnut hair. She cast an imperious, almost threatening, glance over the company, as tho seeking out those who were preparing to attack her and the one who had promised to defend her. Her eyes passed over Marenval and Tragomer without a pause, and fastened with questioning glance on Sorège.

The latter with a smile arose, and, crossing the room with admirable self-assurance, offered his arm to the singer.

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These two, standing alone in the middle of the company, seemed as tho challenging fortune to do her worst. Jenny Hawkins's lofty brow did not lower, as with firm step she entered this drawing-room, where she felt her destiny was to be decided. Miss Maud and Harvey advanced to meet her, and were already thanking her for the kindness she had shown in acceding to their request. From their corner the three Frenchmen could not help admiring the courage, the superior sang-froid and pride with which this woman carried herself. A more rapid heaving of her snow-white breast and a nervous twitching of her charming eyes alone testified to the anguish with which she was tortured. To all appearance she was tranquil, as much at ease as the most indifferent of Julius Harvey's guests. Tragomer chose this moment to rise from his seat and go to pay his respects to the singer. She saw him approach, and a shudder ran over her velvety skin, but she did not even turn her head. It was only on hearing him address her in English that a gesture of surprise escaped her, so perfectly executed that Christian stood looking at her in admiration.

"Ah! M. de Tragomer, I believe?" she said.

She held out her hand, which he shook; then with perfect sang-froid and calm, pure voice added:

"We have traversed a considerable distance since the evening we last saw one another. . . ."

"You have carried off fresh triumphs," said Tragomer.

"And you have undertaken fresh explorations; have you been lucky in your discoveries?"



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This sentence, with its double meaning, was uttered with such fine irony that Christian trembled. He reflected; what guaranty of her security can she have that she speaks in this tone of raillery and under such circumstances? Then he imagined she was perhaps trying to intimidate him. He replied:

"I will allow you to judge for yourself if it is of any interest to you."

"Certainly."

She nodded to the young man, and was led away to the piano by Miss Harvey. Sorège had taken a seat near the hearth, and there with eyelids seemingly closed he appeared absorbed in strict attention. Still, he did not lose sight of the singer. A profound silence reigned, the pianist played a short prelude, then, as tho to intensify the challenge she had flung at Tragomer, Jenny Hawkins sang the "Ave Maria" from "Othello," which the young man had heard in San Francisco that memorable evening. She expressed in tones of exquisite feeling Desdemona's anguish and prayer for pity. Her pure, beautiful voice seemed to have gained in flexibility as well as in compass. A murmur of delight spread through the audience, and without any fear of exhibiting a lack of dignity, Harvey's guests applauded enthusiastically. The cowboys themselves had been won over by the charm of inspiration, and astonished at the sensations they experienced they stayed there motionless, in one corner of the salon, without thought of taking refuge in the smoking-room, as they had intended to do.

Again the sweet strains of the piano were heard,

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and Jenny Hawkins, radiant in her white robe, stood there in the middle of the company, fascinating it by her beauty as well as by her talent, as she cast a domineering look over her admirers. She was now singing the doleful strains of "La Traviata," when the poor woman feels the approach of death. Expressions of farewell to life, happiness, and love escaped her lips, in melodious soul-stirring strains. Suddenly, just as Jenny Hawkins was singing the final bars, closing the cadence with heart-rending expression, her eyes assumed a fixed gaze, and a look of pallor spread over her face; she raised her arm with a gesture of terror, the words died away on her lips, and leaning on the piano, as tho to prevent herself from falling backward, the singer stood there motionless, terrible to behold in her pose of tragic horror.

A man had just appeared before the silk curtain covering the door of the salon. She recognized Jacques de Fréneuse, standing there sorrowful, pale and thin, a dreaded specter painful to behold. The audience, impressed by this sight and troubled by the singer's attitude, attributing to inspiration what was nothing but the effect of fear, burst forth into a transport of admiration. But already Miss Harvey had drawn near to Jenny Hawkins, and taking her by the hand, asked her:

"What is the matter, Madame? Are you in pain?"

"No. It is nothing," stammered the singer, "nothing!"

Her terrified eyes, however, pointed out to the young girl the stranger standing there, motionless,

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near the silk door-hangings. The latter was now smiling, sure of his power, no longer looking at Jenny Hawkins. His eyes were fixed on another gloomy face, the grinning deformations of which he followed with fierce joy. Sorège, too, was wondering if he had lost his senses, or if some miracle or other had brought from the tomb him whom he had buried alive in it. He, too, had followed Jenny Hawkins's eyes, and had seen the formidable visitor.

Passing one hand over his forehead, he took a step backward as tho about to flee; but suddenly he saw Tragomer and Marenval, who were watching him. He had sufficient strength to think: I am ruining myself; a little determination and I will escape this danger. What can they do to me? And I can do everything against him! . . . Just then the stranger nodded to Tragomer, who arose to meet him, and both of them, crossing the salon, drew near the piano. There were standing Miss Maud and Jenny Hawkins. Toward which of the two were they walking in that tranquil fashion? Was it toward the mistress of the house, to pay her their respects, or toward the singer, to ruin her?

Seeing these two men approaching, Jenny Hawkins gave a slight moan. Her heart seemed to cease beating and the light to vanish from her eyes. She was no longer looking, and her ears heard none but vague, uncertain sounds. She, however, heard, tho confusedly, Tragomer saying:

"Miss Maud, allow me to introduce to you a friend of mine, Sir Herbert Carlton! . . ."

At these words a feeling of delightful relief came

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over Jenny Hawkins. A flash of hope brought back the light of intelligence to her brain. She had again begun to think, to understand. Had she not been the sport of an illusion? How could this young man, whose name was Herbert Carlton, be Jacques de Fréneuse? Might it not be a case of an extraordinary and terrible resemblance? She had almost died, still she dared not look at the newcomer standing there two steps away. Turning her eyes toward Sorège, she saw with terror that he was as agitated as she.

In the anguish depicted on his countenance, she had a presentiment of an imminent disaster. Then he, too, believed that their victim might have escaped in spite of all the precautions taken and infamous crimes committed. He did not admit that the pretended Herbert Carlton could be any other than Jacques de Fréneuse. She was in such suffering through curiosity that she resolved, at the risk of ruin, to see the man again, look down into the depths of his heart, and discover his inmost thoughts. Raising her eyes she looked.

Within reach of her hand, still paler through pent-up emotion, she recognized Jacques by the side of Tragomer, standing there grave and attentive. It was indeed Jacques. He acknowledged this by the look she knew so well, the movement of the lips she had loved, and by the accustomed perfume that reached her. This time a shiver ran over her; she was now resigned, awaiting her sentence. She no longer offered any resistance to fate. A superior force came into play, and after so many struggles, flights, and tears she retired within herself, and pas-

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sively, like the hunted animal caught in the toils, offered her throat to the death-blow.

Suddenly, Jacques spoke, and this time all error was out of the question.

"I am doubly thankful to Monsieur de Tragomer for having honored me by an introduction to yourself, Miss Harvey, and given me the pleasure of hearing so great an artiste as Miss Hawkins."

"You live in London, Sir Carlton?" asked Maud.

"I have been here only a week. Reverses of fortune have compelled me to live in the country. There I was alone, forsaken and unhappy. But my friends remembered me and led me out of my desert. Accordingly you may imagine the joy and gratitude I feel this evening, Miss Harvey."

The voice was so sad, so soft and tender, that Jenny Hawkins shuddered with grief. But she had no time to give way to this emotion. With a boldness which seemed as tho it would crush all obstacles, Sorège flung himself into the mêlée and took the offensive.

"You sang divinely, Miss Hawkins," said he, with a haughty glance at his opponents, "and I can well understand how happy you must be. . . ."

He seemed to be soliciting an introduction, and Miss Maud deferred to his desire.

"Sir Herbert Carlton, a friend of M. de Tragomer."

"I thought so," said Sorège, with superb irony. "But will not Miss Hawkins do us the further pleasure of singing the second couplet of this exquisite melody?"

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"May I beg you to do so, Miss Hawkins?" asked Jacques.

The singer had listened tremblingly to this rapid conversation, and had passed from fear to hope and from hope to despair with a rapidity calculated to break the strongest will. However, she still struggled. As she stood there in her white toilette, none of those watching her could have suspected the fearful tempest raging in her heart. There stood a group in the middle of the room, consisting of three men and two women, speaking to one another with perfect ease and breeding. All were a prey to either terror or anger. Their actions were gentle and easy, the words they spoke graceful and harmonious. Their hearts were full of hatred and their tongues could with difficulty refrain from expressions of insult and provocation.

"I will sing if you wish me to do so," said Jenny Hawkins.

"Gentlemen, regain your seats."

And Miss Maud, according to the promise she had made Tragomer, drawing up a chair, took up a position close to the singer. Tragomer, Sorège, and Jacques, as tho by one accord, returned toward the door leading into the conservatory. They entered, and there, without the slightest hesitation, but with a boldness which stupefied his two interlocutors, Sorège said:

"What is the meaning of this comedy, Jacques? Why are you here under an assumed name, and pretending not to know me? Why all this mistrust? Have you doubts as to the joy I should feel on see-

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ing you again, and why did you trust yourself to Tragomer rather than to me, since your arrival here?"

The situation was now free from all ambiguity. Sorège was acting an audacious part, but Jacques could no longer be his dupe. He knew him now, and replied at once:

"I am here under an assumed name, Sorège, because I am an unhappy victim who can no longer live under his own. I have no confidence in you, as I am not certain you did not contribute to my ruin, and are not ready to betray me."

"I," exclaimed Sorège, "your friend from childhood, who bewailed your misfortune as tho it were my own!"

"And who continued to make no attempt to repair it," interrupted Jacques, roughly. "How long, Sorège, have you known that Jenny Hawkins is the same woman as Léa Pérelli?"

He looked him straight in the face; the other met his gaze unflinchingly.

"Are you mad? What! This American? Léa Pérelli! Alas! You know well enough she is dead! You are the victim of a resemblance which struck me, I confess. Oh! I am well aware there is an extraordinary similarity of features! . . ."

He was interrupted by Tragomer, who laid his hand on his arm and said sadly, for he saw Sorège was lost:

"Do not lie, Sorège; you are well aware you acknowledged to me that Jenny Hawkins was Jeanne Baud. . . . It is only complete frankness which will

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extricate you from this scrape. If you have made a mistake, explain it fully. Perhaps Jacques might prove indulgent. But make no further attempt to deny facts, for that is useless. Every step you take now in that direction will be the more certain to lead to your ruin. . . ."

"Lead to my ruin!" interrupted Sorège violently, "what a strange reversing of rôles! I! Punished! I, who have done nothing with which to reproach myself! . . ."

"While I, you infer," added Jacques, with a bitter laugh, "have been convicted of a crime! Yes, Sorège, you are right, if I am guilty, you are innocent!"

"Jacques! Can it be possible! You accuse me, you suspect me! Of what crime?"

"I will tell you, as you have the audacity to ask me, seeing that you did not disappear on seeing me, to free yourself of your; responsibility and since, in opposition to all evidence, you still maintain the struggle. I accuse you of having known that Léa was alive from the very first, when I was being condemned for having killed her. I accuse you of having come before the Assize Court on oath, and there made a false deposition, which is a crime for any honest man, but which, for you, Sorège, my friend, my brother, as you said just now, is the basest and most cowardly action one could commit. This is what I accuse you of, since you insist on knowing it."

Sorège had borne this terrible apostrophe with the utmost firmness. He was not listening, he had no need to listen, as he knew beforehand what Jacques



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was about to say. He tried to gain time, to reflect. He thought: Jacques knows that Léa is alive, he knows that she substituted herself for Jeanne Baud. But does he know that it is Jeanne Baud who is dead? Everything lies there. If he is still in the dark on this point, there is nothing lost. Léa is living, but it is not a crime to live. And I may only have learned of her existence later on. That is my plan. And with wonderful rapidity it passed from conception to execution.

"Madness! Utter madness!" he exclaimed. "You have been deceived by false appearances. The reason I said nothing at the trial was that I knew nothing. You have recognized Léa Pérelli in Jenny Hawkins. Tragomer, too, has recognized her. But I have been her dupe longer than you, and it was only at the end of my voyage, when Tragomer met me at San Francisco, that I had succeeded in discovering the identity of the singer. I too have been deceived, as you have!"

He continued to think all the time he was speaking. With the dexterity of a skilful weaver he crossed in and out the threads of his intrigue. I must leave here indemnified, and see Léa before they do. If I can obtain a quarter of an hour's conversation with her, I will let her understand that she must fly. Once out of the way, I am saved.

"You!" resumed Jacques. "You, deceived? No, Sorège, you have never been the dupe of any one. For some reason I am ignorant of, it was to your interest to say nothing. For I am not going so far as I could, you understand, and I still see in you noth-

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ing but a faithless friend who has abandoned instead of helped me. But if, to your misfortune, you have been an accomplice. . . .”

Jacques's countenance assumed a terrible expression. He rose, resolute and menacing in appearance, and looked down at Sorège, standing there with bowed head and hesitating mien.

“If you have been an accomplice, you must pay me for all the torture I have endured through you; the prayers of my despairing sister; the tears of my poor mother; whose position has been ruined through you. . . .”

“No more threats! I have been too patient! Your mother and sister have wept over your own follies, and you alone are responsible. If you have suffered, the reason is that you have committed unpardonable offenses. Cease laying the responsibility on others. Has the bagnio accomplished a miracle, and converted a vice-stained wretch into a saint? Because you have been condemned, have you thus obtained the right to judge others? Let us no longer lose common sense. There is here an honest man, shamefully treated, but you are not that man! You pretend you have the right to take vengeance on me. I reply that you are mad, and I will prove it, if you force me to do so. Take my advice, be prudent, do not misuse the good fortune you have had in escaping. Noisy anger does not suit everybody. It would be preferable for you to live quietly under the English name you have adopted this evening, rather than attract to yourself a degree of attention which might become dangerous. You have repulsed me,

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Jacques, and I was disposed to help you. Now I am free of every obligation toward you. Adieu!"

He took three steps in the direction of the salon, and was stretching out his hand to turn the knob of the door when it opened of itself. Marenval and Vesin entered the conservatory; a breath of perfumed air and a murmur of applause came to them. It was Jenny Hawkins, who was ending her song.

"Shut the door, Marenval, please," said Trago-mer coldly. "M. de Sorège would like to take leave of us in too audacious a manner. He imagines us far simpler than we are."

"Do you wish me to break through?" exclaimed Sorège.

"To break through! What a violent expression! No; but we intend to continue our conversation in the presence of M. de Vesin, attorney-general at the Paris law courts. Oh! do not be alarmed. He is taking a holiday in London, and is no magistrate on this occasion, but simply a tourist . . . and our dear Marenval, whom you are well acquainted with. The more witnesses there are of what we have already said, and of what we have made up our minds to say still, the better it will be. Contrary to what you advised just now, we are determined to make as much noise as possible. Nor will Jacques, to please you, become Sir Herbert Carlton forever, to make a counterpart to Jenny Hawkins. No, Sorège, we do not intend to be your dupes any longer. That time is gone; we understand you now thoroughly. When Jacques has had an hour's conversation with

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Léa Pérelli, rest assured he will be in a position to confound you and rehabilitate himself."

Sorège made so threatening a gesture that Tragomer flung himself in front of Jacques. Around him were four men, and all hope of escaping them seemed lost.

"You scoundrels!" he exclaimed. "You take advantage of strength and of numbers to restrain me. . . ."

"Come, sir," said Marenval, "you are jesting. You call it being restrained to be here in a delightful conservatory, in the company of gentlemen. Besides, if you like, we will call Miss Maud Harvey, and beg her to keep you company, until Miss Hawkins has gone, and our friend Fréneuse after her. As soon as this double exit is effected, you shall have full liberty to return to the salons, and take supper with your future father-in-law's guests. Do not be obstinate, let everything be done in correct style."

Sorège reflected: If I can be free in an hour, perhaps no irreparable harm will be done. Accordingly he said:

"I have nothing to fear, you will do as you please. I have no intention to stir from here, but you have insulted me and offered me violence, and I rely upon your granting me satisfaction, if any honorable man among you has also a little courage."

He looked disdainfully at Fréneuse as he spoke thus, and seemed to be challenging Tragomer.

"Take care, Sorège," exclaimed Jacques, "do not be too exacting this evening, for to-morrow, per-

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haps, so little honor will be left you that it would be a charity to accept your challenge."

He exchanged a final look with his enemy, and, with a bow to Vesin, left the conservatory. In the midst of her admirers Jenny Hawkins, with a smile on her lips, was standing in the middle of the salon. She saw Jacques approach her, and shuddered at the sight, but made no movement. Her arms fell by her side as tho broken, and her fan between her trembling fingers shook like a wounded butterfly. Jacques came nearer, his look stern and imperious. Crossing the different groups, he succeeded in isolating Miss Harvey and the singer from the rest. He began by uttering a few commonplace expressions of congratulation, then, certain of being heard by herself alone, said:

"You will return home and wait for me. In half an hour I will call. Give orders for me to be received."

Bowing her head, she replied:

"I will obey you."

"Very well."

Stepping aside, and with a smile to Miss Harvey, he said aloud:

"You have given us a rare treat this evening, and Miss Hawkins has sung divinely."

## Chapter V

### A CONFESSION

MISS JENNY HAWKINS had returned to her apartment in Tavistock Street. Standing in the middle of the salon, which was lit by two lamps on the mantelpiece, she had just dismissed her maid, saying she would disrobe herself alone, and was awaiting in the silence the arrival of her dreaded visitor. A sound of heels was heard at this late hour in the solitary street, a rapid step on the stairs, a quick ring at the bell, and, crossing the dark corridor, she opened the door herself. Through the half-opened drawing-room door came a light which enabled her to recognize Jacques in spite of his hat, which was lowered over his eyes, and the collar of his overcoat rising to his mouth.

He entered very suddenly, passed in front of her, came to a halt in the well-lit salon without even turning round to see whether or not she was following him, removed his hat and overcoat, then, leaning against the mantelpiece, he looked fixedly at her who possessed the secret on which depended his safety. She, agitated, but more beautiful than ever in her anxiety, her splendid bust sparkling in the light, waited with bowed head till he should **speak**. In tones of terrible irony he began :

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"The dead are capable of returning to life, Léa, since here you are alive, before me, after I have been condemned for having killed you. You imagined yourself well rid of the unhappy Jacques, did you not? And you slept in tranquil ease, knowing I was in a safer tomb than yours. For all that I am out of it, and have now come to ask for payment for all I have suffered."

With a shake of the head she replied, in dull tones:

"Have you been the only one to suffer? Is the responsibility of what you have suffered another's or your own? Can you possibly have forgotten what you have done? Are you sure you have the right to accuse me so bitterly? When one suffers two years pass slowly, and one has time to reflect. Have you examined your own conduct while judging that of others?"

"Wretched woman! You bring back to my mind the saddest hours of my existence, when in the quiet and silence of the bagnio I almost went mad in trying to discover the cause of my misfortune. Could I judge what I had no means of understanding? I was ignorant of everything in my fate. To me my condemnation was an inexplicable enigma. However grave my mistakes had been, they could not suffice to justify the excess of my misery. How ever could I have succeeded in establishing responsibilities? Gloom had been so cleverly cast around me that nothing could have enlightened me! Léa Pérelli dead! Why? How? By whose hand? I was utterly lost in the chaos of my conjectures. Judges,

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lawyers, jury, none could have seen what it was materially impossible to suspect: an infamous snare, in which an innocent man had been caught, and while he was struggling in it, mad with grief and ignorance, the pretended victim was in flight, making sport of justice deceived and innocence tortured, and congratulating herself with her accomplice that the affair had passed off so well and come to so fortunate a conclusion. And I, utterly in the dark; bandied about by the judges, who looked upon me as a hardened villain when they heard me deny desperately before the lawyers, who considered me stupid, as they saw I was silent when I ought to have defended myself; a laughing-stock to the police, and an object of horror to the populace, dragged down into the mud by moralizing journals, ready to lose my reason and actually believe I had committed the crime! Yes, I went from jail to the bagnio at Nouméa, to live among bandits under a blazing tropical sun. That was my fate, that of the most pitiable of human beings. And for what reason? . . . For having been so ill-fated as to love a savage creature, who made a mockery of my sufferings and congratulated herself on my downfall!"

Léa raised her arm, and looking at Jacques for the first time with terror-stricken eyes, she said:

"No; not for having had the misfortune to love her, but the depravity to betray her!"

At these words, the first ray of light in the obscurity with which he had been enveloped for two years, Jacques gave a leap, and with all his attention strained to penetrate the mystery, he said:



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"Ah! you wretch! Then you confess at last. You wished to avenge yourself?"

"Yes," said Léa sternly; "I wished to do so, but you had driven me to it. Chance, however, has played the greater part of what happened."

"Then I shall know at last!" exclaimed Jacques in a kind of delirium. "I hold you here accused, woman, and you shall speak, do you hear, tho I have to tear your secret with my nails from your very heart! Oh! I shall be without pity as you have been. Do not hope for any pardon. You shall tell everything, or upon my honor I will kill you, and this time you will not rise again!"

He raised himself to his full height, and his countenance expressed an invincible resolution. But Léa appeared to become calmer in proportion as he became more violent. She sat down by his side and said gently:

"It is useless to threaten me. I have made up my mind to speak. If you had not come to me, and I had known you were in London, I would have found you myself. Too long has this secret been weighing on my conscience, too long have I been tortured by remorse. You speak of what you have suffered; now you shall hear of my sufferings, and then you may compare. Perhaps your slavery was no more bitter than my freedom. You had, at any rate, the right to bewail and curse, while I was obliged to shine and charm, and bury my grief in my own heart. I am not the only one who is guilty, but I think I am the only one to offer any expiation of my crime."

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"Then you had accomplices?" asked Jacques.

"One only."

"Sorèze?"

"Yes."

"The wretch! Why did he ruin me?"

"Because he loved me."

Jacques stood there, motionless and silent, scarcely breathing, so oppressed was he by the anguish of that solemn moment. Finally he added:

"But you, Léa, why did you lend yourself to his infamy? Why did you help to bring about my downfall?"

She replied, in fierce, desperate tones:

"Because I loved you!"

"And yet you condemned me to torture worse than death? Then who was the murdered woman, and what had she done to you?"

"What you had done yourself. She shamefully betrayed me, was about to leave Paris with you, insulted me with her triumph, and scoffed at my jealousy. In short, she dared me to do my worst!"

Jacques shuddered, now he understood; in terrified tones he asked:

"Was it Jeanne Baud?"

"Yes, it was Jeanne Baud."

"Then who killed her?"

She proudly raised her head, and in a shriek of passion replied:

"I did!"

"You, Léa, wretched woman! In what way?"

"You shall know all!"

Silence followed, broken only by Léa's panting

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respiration. The varied sounds of the sleeping city gradually died away; a few carriages alone could be dimly heard in the distance. Jacques sank, gloomy and exhausted, on to the sofa, and sure of now learning what he had so long wished to know, he quietly prepared to listen. The woman, leaning toward him, her face clouded with violent emotion, her elbows resting on her knees, balancing her body with an unconscious movement, began to speak in broken accents:

"You know how much I loved you, what an exclusive passion I felt for you. For two years you had been my very life. I subordinated everything—my habits, tastes, whims—to your fancy, and never was king more flattered and caressed by a favorite, who had everything to hope for from him, than you were by me who had nothing to expect from you. I was not venal; I never asked you for money. I have lived in your life, and if you squandered your fortune, do me the justice to acknowledge that I did not encourage you in this, and had nothing to do with it. You loved me, too, and revealed to me the meaning of the word. I attached myself ardently to you. You introduced your friends to me, and appeared proud of the admiration I inspired. You were not jealous—how indeed could you be? for you knew I was yours alone, and that no other man could exist for me. All the companions of your dissipated life made love to me; I may say all except Tragomer, who mistrusted me. You knew this from all except one; this one I had judged from the first day I saw him, and he inspired me with fear. . . ."

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"Scrège?" asked Jacques.

"Sorège," repeated Léa. "He was not an insignificant profligate like the rest, but impressed me by the originality of his attitude and his biting, cynical language. It was not possible to pass him by unnoticed, and when once one had met him, he must be remembered, if only to be hated. He inspired me with fear alone. Approaching me in crafty, cunning ways, he found means to express to me his sentiments without compromising himself by any clearly expressed confession. He knew how to guard against a revelation, and had I thought of complaining, he might have laid me under the necessity of repeating what he had said without it being possible for me to find any plausible ground of complaint. I dared not jest with you about his conduct, as I had done concerning the rest. I spoke to him with disdain and scorn, and my words must have made him suffer terribly; for I saw him lose his temper for the first time. He turned pale, and with frightful threats swore that, even tho he were to kill you, he would make me yield to his will. For, he added, he was well aware that the passion I had for you was the obstacle in his way."

"Coward!" exclaimed Jacques, the lines of his face contracted with fury. "Why did you not tell me?"

"Because you were beginning to detach yourself from me. I perceived it, and he lost no opportunity of proving it to me. He played the part of Iago with atrocious skill. Only it was Desdemona he was murdering with his poisoned confidences.

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Everything concerning your business or pleasure you revealed to him in your ill-placed faith he repeated to me. I ought to have driven him away, for he tortured me. But I was eager to know, and lent a ready ear to his information, thinking I might make use of it to keep you the more easily to myself. All the same, he smiled, the wretch, and cynically counted the days of my remaining happiness. Our interviews were nothing but torrents of insults. I cursed him, and he grossly insulted me, and we took leave of each other every time more exasperated than ever. That was the time when everything was going on badly with you, debts accumulating and creditors becoming pressing. And you, madder than ever, infatuated with gambling, passing your nights at the club and your days at the races, completely neglected me. I was abandoned by the one I adored, hounded down by the man I hated, helpless and without defense, given up to the violent impulses of my exasperated mind. There was danger for me in everything. Just at that period I made the acquaintance of Jeanne Baud. She wished to enter upon an Italian career, and asked me to help to improve her faulty pronunciation. I was without occupation, passing a useless, wearied life, and I imagined it would be a distraction for me to give advice to this charming artiste. As an exception, I, who had never received any friend of my own sex, allowed her access to my home. You remember her, do you not? Youthful, gay, and smiling, careless of everything and passionately fond of pleasure. Never had I had any lady friends, ex-

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cept in high society in Italy. Jeanne's vivacious effusions appeared to me strange, but she was so attentive that I imputed everything to friendship. I was unhappy; in this interesting girl I had an ever-present companion, who filled up the void of my existence. I became tenderly attached to her. One evening, we were both returning from the opera; she accompanied me home, and I learned what was passing in her mind. I was expecting you; we had both finished supper, when a knock came to the door.

"'It is Jacques!' I exclaimed. 'He has forgotten his key. Wait here and I will open the door for him.'

"Reaching the vestibule, I asked, before opening the door:

"'Jacques, is it you?'

"Sorège's voice answered:

"'No, it is I. May I have a word with you? I will not stay a minute.'

"I felt greatly inclined to dismiss him, but Jeanne's presence reassured me. I had nothing to fear, so I opened the door. He entered the salon without suspecting that I was not alone. Then he said immediately, without taking a seat:

"'Are you waiting for Jacques? He will not come.'

"'Why not?'

"'Because he has gone elsewhere.'

"'To the club?'

"'No, he has just left the club.'

"He laughed as he spoke thus, the monster, well

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knowing what pain he was causing me. I turned pale; he noticed it and said:

“Look at yourself, Léa, see how excited you are! The thought of Jacques will kill you, if you do not make up your mind to leave him.”

“He insulted me abominably, and in the midst of the scene the drawing-room door opened, and Jeanne appeared.

“The effect was instantaneous. Without uttering a word, but casting on both of us a look of exasperated hate, he left the room. I, with nerves unstrung and beating heart, burst into sobs. Jeanne sank upon her knees and tried to console me. My tears flowed unceasingly; and she kissed them away. I listened to her in a stupid, dazed fashion, with the feeling how pleasant it was to be loved, and that the sweetness of the caresses I was receiving was infinitely better than the despairing state I had been passing through. I experienced how agreeable it was to have a devoted heart to whom I could tell all my troubles. During the months that followed I loved her perhaps more passionately than ever. At the mere thought that she might leave me I was ready to meet death itself. You remember the end of that terrible period, when you spent both days and nights in gambling, as tho you were bent on giving up everything: fortune, life, even honor itself. Sorège kept me au courant with every phase of the struggle. A kind of dull stupor seemed to have come over me. At that time I was not in full possession of my reason. My nerves were overstrung, and I lived without moral equilibrium, and

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at the mercy of despair or anger. I saw you come to me maddened with grief, after losing all you had, and under the obligation of paying to the club a large sum under penalty of expulsion. I gave you my jewels to pledge; I would have given you my life had you asked me to do so. It was then, do you understand, that the frightful catastrophe happened, which, depriving me of all self-control, brought about all my troubles."

Her voice, hoarse with the emotion caused by the recollection of these terrible memories, Léa stopped a moment. Jacques, impassive, no longer interrupted her, fascinated as he was by the thrilling intensity of the story. Not a sigh had he given; he was utterly remorseless; for he, at any rate, had atoned for his faults and so he reserved his pity for himself. He would have liked to hasten on Léa's fevered eloquence as she recited the tragic plot. What mattered it to him what she was telling of Sorège, or Jeanne, or of herself? What he was anxious to know was how he had been ruined, and in what way his honor might be restored. Léa passed her lace handkerchief over her moist brow, and, attempting to calm the tempest beating within her breast, continued:

"Then something unexpected and monstrous happened. The day following the one on which I gave you all I possessed, about four o'clock, I received a visit from Sorège. He had a dull, gloomy look, as tho he were troubled by some serious event. Sitting down, he looked at me in silence with an expression of pity which I had never seen in him before. Fi-



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nally he spoke, and at his very first words a shriek of rage and madness burst from me. He told me that you had no longer any hope of regaining your former position in Paris, and that you had made up your mind to leave for London with Jeanne Baud, who had just signed an agreement there without my knowledge. Altho accustomed to my bursts of passion, Sorège appeared to be afraid. With his treacherous good-nature he tried to calm me:

“ ‘ I had told you that the hour would come when I would prove to you the sincerity of my friendship. You see how devoid of all conscience Jacques is, and how ungrateful is Jeanne. Both are insulting and betraying you. Will you hesitate to be the first to break with Jacques, and drive away this vile, worthless woman toward whom you have shown too much kindness? ’

“ I protested, and defended you.

“ ‘ How can you prove that you are not deceiving me? To gain your own ends you are capable of anything. How could I have had no inkling of their intimacy? Is it not too much to your interest to lie, for you to imagine that I can believe you so easily? ’

“ ‘ There is no need to discuss the matter,’ he said coldly. ‘ You see, I bring no charge against them. What is the use? They are quite sufficiently mad and guilty. Learn, then, that it is from Jacques himself that I have heard these details. Judge whether or not they are correct. Jeanne, who lives in furnished rooms, gave notice last week. Her trunks have been packed since yesterday, and she is on the point of taking them to the baggage-room

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of the Gare du Nord. She is to cross viâ Boulogne and Folkestone; he will go by another route, and they will meet on the way. Is that clear?'

"He spoke so calmly that I no longer tried to discuss it. No further doubt was possible. The truth was crushing me and a feeling of mad rage was beginning to fill my heart. I shrieked with passion, in that small salon, where I had passed so many happy hours, now that I saw myself doubly betrayed. For I was losing everything at a blow. Sorège, impassive, without offering me any encouragement, as tho his triumph depended on the excess of my pain and grief, listened to me in silence. At last he said:

"'Is not Jeanne to see you before she leaves?'

"'I am expecting her every minute. I have given my servants a holiday and was intending to dine with her. She will not come; she will not have the impudence to do so!'

"'Ha! ha!' sneered Sorège. 'It is a great, a delicious joy to be present at a mystification one has prepared, and to rail at the stupid confidence displayed by the victim of one's treachery! I should not be in the least surprised if she came to kiss you for the last time before running off with Jacques!'

"'Curse her!' I exclaimed.

"'But what can you do to her?' said Sorège with a laugh. 'You can not tear out her eyes or do anything so vulgar.'

"I made no reply; sinister ideas passed through my troubled brain, and I felt myself carried away by a thirst for murder. Sorège said to me:

"'I am very sorry I have spoken to you of this.

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You look as tho inclined to do something rash and foolish. Come, calm yourself. I will call and see how you are after dinner. I hope I shall find you in a more reasonable frame of mind.'

"He left me alone. I lay there on a sofa, my head buried in the cushions, carefully going over again, suffering keenly all the while, the venom this monster had instilled into my mind, for he had arranged everything—of this I had a firm conviction afterward—to drive me to commit an act of utter madness. A knock at the door roused me from my torpor and brought me to my feet. I looked at the clock; it was seven. I opened the door, and Jeanne entered in high spirits, kissed me in the semi-obscurity of the vestibule, humming an air as she followed me into the salon, where she stood transfixed with wonder at seeing how pale and excited I was.

"'What is the matter with you?' she exclaimed, uneasy at my silence.

"Meanwhile I was examining her, and saw that she had on her traveling-gown and her round hat, and was carrying a leather satchel. The certainty that Sorège had told the truth came to me with terrific force. Before so much duplicity I regained my sang-froid, and replied calmly, almost in tired accents:

"'I have a headache; you see I am in my dressing-gown. If you like we will not go out to dinner to-night. I have sufficient here to make a good meal. We will stay quietly by the fireside, and you shall keep me company as long as you like.'

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"Usually, Jeanne gave a joyful assent to such a proposal. Now she appeared cold, and a shadow came over her eyes:

" 'I will dine with you certainly, and with pleasure, as I had promised. But I can not spend the evening with you. I have a rendezvous with Camipstron, my singing-professor, on an important matter. I must leave at nine o'clock.' "

"Her hypocrisy exasperated me, and I said with ironical look:

" 'Are you certain that you are going to your singing-professor?' "

"My attitude and the tone of my voice caused her a sudden agitation. Drawing back a step, she stammered out:

" 'What are you asking me? Why should I tell you a lie?' "

"I walked up to her until I was almost touching her, then I said:

" 'Because you have already deceived me and are deceiving me again; because you are a worthless creature, who, not content with robbing me of your affection, have also robbed me of Jacques's love!' "

"She blushed, and, her teeth clenched with fear and anger, said:

" 'Who has told you this?' "

" 'I know it.' "

" 'It is false.' "

" 'False! You are leaving with him for England, taking him from me, when you know I can not live without him. You are killing me, you. . . .'

"I was choking, losing all self-control, as I stood

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there stunned before her, unable to say a word. Thinking me to be powerless and crushed, she regained courage, and with an insolent laugh said:

“‘ Ah! you were too fond of me to care very much for him!’

“Thus braving me, she wounded me in my most sensitive spot. Drawing back a step, and finding no word sufficiently strong to hurl at her, I struck her in the face with all my might. She gave a dull moan, turned livid, and with flashing eyes turned upon me. I felt her hands twine around my neck, and I lost my breath. In self-defense I thrust my knee against her breast, trying to throw her down. We struggled in this way, without a single cry, breathing hatred and murder. A mist began to appear before my eyes. Seizing her by the throat, I squeezed with such violence that my nails entered the flesh. Suddenly she ceased fighting and fell on the carpet. I flung myself on her like a Fury. There only survived in me the instinct of the brute which must kill in order to live. After a moment I tired of my efforts, and as she offered no further resistance, stretched there motionless, I stood upright, and with haggard eyes looked at her. There she lay, her face purple with the blows I had dealt, her eyeballs turned up, her mouth still preserving that horrible and threatening grimace. I stepped back; as reason returned, a horrible feeling of dread took possession of me. A shudder came over me as I saw that motionless body, and seizing it I tried to raise it, but it appeared heavy and inert in my arms. I shouted out ‘Jeanne,’ but she made no reply.

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Wishing to make an attempt to bring her back to life, I was about to call for help, but prudence stopped me. I felt her heart, applied my ear to her breast, and drew back in dismay! There was not the slightest beating. She was dead! A feeling of terrible despair took possession of me. Was it possible that I had become a criminal? Doubtless, she had betrayed and insulted as well as struck me! But I had killed her! And now, what would become of me? All the consequences of my action immediately presented themselves to my mind. I imagined myself arrested and prosecuted, finally condemned to death; and I was overcome by an indescribable feeling of terror, and determined to flee at once from the fate which awaited me. Without knowing where I was going or thinking of dressing myself, without money, I flew down-stairs with the sole thought of escaping my victim and effecting my escape. On reaching the first floor, I felt a hand on my shoulder and heard a voice say suddenly:

“‘ Well! Léa, where are you running to?’ ”

“I halted in stupid bewilderment, without making any reply. It was Sorège, who, as he had said, was returning to see what had happened. My agitation, the disordered state of my dress, doubtless told him as much as it was necessary to know, for he seized me by the arm and said in a whisper:

“‘ Are you mad? What is the meaning of this? Come back with me.’ ”

“He made me return to my rooms, bolted the door, entered the drawing-room first, for I would not lead the way, and, as he saw by the thickening

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gloom Jeanne Baud stretched there on the floor, he turned to me and said:

“‘This is a fine business! And it is your work, is it? She was a vile hussy, but still the punishment was a brutal one!’

“Impelled by the need of exculpating myself I exclaimed:

“‘She struck me; see here, look at my arms and neck; I did nothing more than defend myself!’

“He replied with a sang-froid which was frightful in such a circumstance:

“‘I am convinced of that. But there she lies dead all the same. And it is all over with you!’

“I flung myself into his arms.

“‘Are you going to abandon me? What shall I do, if you will not try to save me?’

“I burst into tears. He looked at me calmly.

“‘Abandon you, I? Could you imagine such a thing? Do you not know me? I was certain you would some day need me. I told you I should be at hand. Here I am, ready to defend you.’

“‘Be quick!’ I exclaimed in trembling accents.

“‘We have plenty of time. It is eight o’clock now. Your servants will not return before midnight, and I suppose they will not come into this room?’

“‘No.’

“‘It is possible that Jacques might come, but he will take good care not to do so, for an excellent reason. Accordingly we are masters of the situation.’

“He reflected for a moment, then looking at the dead woman he repeated several times:

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“‘Yes! it is the only means. There is only one thing to do. Whatever happens, we must allow sufficient time for escape.’

“Approaching and overawing me by the strength and clearness of his determination, he said:

“‘It is impossible to remove the corpse from here. Accordingly, it will be discovered to-morrow, when you have fled. Its identity will be recognized, and you will be followed, and delivered up to justice. Here is a dead woman, why should it be Jeanne Baud?’

“‘Who could take her place?’ I asked.

“‘Yourself.’

“‘Myself! How could that be possible? You are raving!’

“He continued, without replying directly:

“‘Jeanne Baud has arranged everything for her departure; she disappears, no search is made. The woman killed here must pass for Léa Pérelli. Under Jeanne’s name, Léa leaves for London. No one knows her. She takes passage on a steamer for America, and meanwhile the police, magistrates, the whole legal machinery, in fact, is set to work to unravel the mystery. Jeanne and Léa are of similar height and form, features and hair alone differ; but features may be rendered unrecognizable, and the lotion Léa used to dye her hair blonde might serve for Jeanne. Identity can be destroyed by a bottle of hair-dye, and a pistol-shot in the face. Jeanne is dead in any case; whether shot or strangled, it is only the method of the murder which changes. That is of slight importance, the main thing is to



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throw the detectives off the scent. And how can we fail to succeed? A woman is found dead in her rooms, fully dressed. How could one doubt as to her identity? What would be the use of hunting for the impossible? Léa Pérelli is dead, and Jeanne Baud is touring about the world. There is the problem solved, why should it be difficult to execute?’

“In the silence of the night, he laughed at my stupor. I had followed his reasoning, and understood the terrible skill therein displayed. But I exclaimed:

“‘Then who, if I leave and if Jeanne Baud disappears, will have committed the crime?’

“‘Ah! ah!’ he said cynically, ‘you have become inquisitive! You are caught in my toils! You ask who will have committed the crime? Very good! The one on whose account the whole thing happened.’

“I was afraid to understand him, but he left me no time for doubt.

“‘Who is guilty throughout it all? Who is it who has so shamefully betrayed you? Who, with your money in his pocket, would have fled with another? Who, head over ears in debt, without hope or credit, and almost without honor, may morally be judged capable of having killed Léa Pérelli?’

“‘Jacques!’ I exclaimed, horrified; ‘oh! Jacques! never! never! I would rather give myself up, be imprisoned, condemned, killed even. But a like infamy. No! no!’

“‘Infamy corresponding to his own! You are

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simply having your revenge. Nothing more. What scruples you have when he had so few! He had left you here, at the risk of killing you with despair and anger. Did he hesitate?’

“‘I will not do it! No, I will not. Leave me alone!’

“Then he became insolent and threatening.

“‘Enough of this! What a fool I am to take so much trouble to convince you; I am doing my best to save you, while you seem to be doing your best to effect your own ruin. Make your own choice; it is absolutely indifferent to me. Heaven knows what responsibility I am incurring for your sake. And you reject my help. Adieu!’

“He took a step in the direction of the door, and, at the thought of remaining alone with that corpse, I lost all energy. My love of honor, cruelly broken into by the insidious arguments of this wretch, began to yield. He tried everything he could possibly imagine to corrupt a soul opposed to evil, and desirous of finding a refuge in sacrifice.

“Soon his victory was assured! Oh! frightful night! I can still picture to myself the atrocious occupation on which we were engaged. We were obliged to disrobe the dead woman, and dress her in my clothes, boots, and jewels. Finally we accomplished the dyeing of her hair. Her dark ringlets became blonde beneath our polluted hands. It was a scene of horror and dread; the perfumed water trickling down the ghastly brow of the corpse—the terrible disguise in preparation for the tomb. How did I endure the trial without my heart break-

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ing? The rest became obscured in a kind of mist. I was half dead when Sorège, making use of a revolver you had given me, fired three chambers full into the face of the victim, who had already been dead several hours. I was utterly helpless; so Sorège dressed me with Jeanne's gown, placed her hat upon my head and a thick veil over my face, and, taking the leather satchel which contained Jeanne's papers, made me leave the house. Of all that belonged to me he had taken nothing but the pawntickets you had brought me back that very morning. I had no idea as to the use he intended to make of them. He conducted me to the station, found the baggage-ticket in the satchel, and, after obtaining Jeanne's baggage, brought me a first-class ticket, and saw me safely into the Boulogne train; then he said:

"Put up at the Casino Hotel and wait for me to-morrow. I shall reach Boulogne to-morrow night and will tell you the news.'

"The train started. He waved me a final sign of encouragement, and I left Paris, almost fainting with fatigue and anguish of heart, leaving behind me the horror of a double crime—the one I had actually committed, and the one I was allowing to be committed."

Jacques, trembling, but otherwise motionless, looked at Léa more in pity than in anger. The horror of the position in which the wretched woman had been placed touched him deeply. He forgot the frightful consequences the act committed had had for him, and saw nothing but the immediate danger Léa had incurred. He said slowly:

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"Yes, everything was boldly plotted out, and was bound to succeed. My own agitation and the absolute impossibility for me to account for Jeanne's fate must have combined to guard the secret. How could the woman found dead in Léa's rooms, clothed in her garments, be any other than Léa herself? I myself had no doubt whatever. Less bold than you were, I turned away my eyes from the corpse when it was pointed out to me in the morgue; I did not touch it as you were obliged to do. One must have a special nature to be able to examine dead bodies closely. An insuperable repugnance came over me, and I could do nothing but weep, when I ought to have discussed and examined. You did not think of all this, Léa, while the hours were going by and my ruin was being assured?"

"Yes, Jacques, I did think of it. But Sorège had come as he had said, and falling once more beneath the influence of my accomplice, I was unable to resist. I tried to do so from the first; I was mad with despair and remorse, and besought him to find some means of exculpating you, once I was out of reach of any possible pursuit; but he only jeered and said, in tones of terrible irony:

"'Do you think I shall plunge into so terrible a matter for the sake of proving M. Jacques de Fréneuse to be innocent? Nonsense! You are mad! He is caught in the toils, let him stay there!'

"'But his mother, who has done nothing whatever, and will bewail her son all her life; his sister, who is innocent, and whose future is now blighted!'

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"His countenance changed, and losing his usual sang-froid, he said:

"Do not speak to me of his sister! You might make me regret that her future is not blighted to a greater degree. I hate them all, do you hear? His sister especially; I was foolhardy enough to love her, and she spurned me. That I shall never forget nor forgive!"

"At that moment he looked so atrocious and cruel that I completely lost my head:

"I will not remain at your mercy; you make me afraid of you, and your friendship is as greatly to be dreaded as your hatred. Let me go; whatever becomes of me, let us separate."

"Seizing me by the arm, and overstepping all bounds of moderation, he was no longer the well-bred man I had known; he now showed himself a brutal and gross character:

"You stupid creature, do you think I will submit to your whims? I am your master; do not forget that you belong to me."

"He had seized me. I tried to resist, but I was too exhausted by the emotions I had passed through, and I gave up the struggle."

In the silence Jacques and Léa remained there motionless and horrified. Finally the wretched woman raised her head, and with a cry of despair flung herself at Jacques's feet:

"O Jacques! Pardon me, I beseech you! I have been a coward. But you see that it is Sorège who has done everything. Is not he a thousand times more guilty than myself, even tho it was not he who

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committed the murder? He had prepared it, and almost driven me to the act. Oh, pardon me! I loved you so well, and I did you so much wrong. I ought to have written to the judge to ask him to set you free, and to hand me over to justice; but I was afraid. I fled, and meanwhile you were atoning for your faithlessness by the most grievous punishment a man could bear. I am at your disposal, Jacques, do with me as you please. I hate Sorège, and I would rather die than see him again, especially now that you have returned. You are still the same, Jacques; you have not changed, you are always generous and kind. Altho you guessed my crime, you did not denounce me. And even when I pursued you with my hatred, I still loved you. Jacques! . . . Jacques! . . ."

She was writhing at his feet. As she raised her beautiful face, streaming with tears, a shiver of passion ran through him. Her smiling and fevered face approached Jacques's, and with a gesture of impassioned ardor she held out to him her lips. He gently thrust her aside, freed himself from her embrace, and left her standing there before him, crushed by this coldness she had hoped to overcome.

"It is late, Léa," he said. "The night is drawing on. We must think of to-morrow. I am greatly obliged to you for your frankness, and do not intend to take advantage of it to ruin you. I am not a Sorège, but I must exculpate myself; I must have a material proof of my innocence. You alone can give me this proof."

"I will do so without hesitation. I have suffered

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too much, and can no longer live in this way. Do you want me to write out these confessions I have just made you? I am ready to do so."

A shadow passed over her face, and a pitiful smile played on her lips.

"Sorège knows that you have discovered everything. He knows we are here alone, and that I intended to speak. . . . Be careful, Jacques!"

He gave a sign of indifference.

"I am not afraid of him."

"Then you are in the wrong."

"He can do nothing against me. I do not move a step in London without being followed by French detectives. I am watched and protected at the same time."

"Then it is I who am lost. To prevent me accusing him, he will try to do away with me. The blow will fall on me as a punishment for having abandoned him."

"He will have quite enough to do to defend himself against me. We have a terrible account to settle. Take my word for it, he is in greater danger than you are."

Jacques then continued:

"You offered to give me your confession in writing. I accept. Do not be uneasy. I will make use of it only when you are in safety. Stay here; locked in your own room. Be not at home to any one, and see no more of Sorège. I will undertake to free you of his presence."

Léa shook her head sadly:

"You do not know him. He will reach me through

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the wall if I stay here, through space if I flee. He is a terrible man and always strikes when no one expects. Take care of yourself, Jacques, for he hates you with a mortal hatred. It matters little what becomes of me. But you have a revenge to take, a public and signal vengeance. Do not compromise it by some imprudent act."

He replied gravely:

"My life is over, Léa. My rehabilitation and the punishment of Sorège are the last acts I shall accomplish as a man. I have seen the world and judged it. The joys it offers are vain, its pains and penalties are real. I shall give up everything that bound me to life. Even if I had not been under the obligation to redeem my name, on account of my mother and sister, I should still accept nothing from you. I should go and kneel at the door of a convent, where I would spend my life in silence and meditation."

"What! Jacques! You, still young and rich, with the hope of happiness before you, flee from the world?"

"Yes, Léa."

"Is your heart broken then? Have you no more desires or aspirations?"

"I know life now; I have tasted deeply of its joys and its sorrows. There is nothing in it to repay men for the trouble they take in killing ennui by pleasure. One scarcely begins to live before old age comes on; and then death. Nothing but vanity! By sweetening the lot of the unhappy and the downtrodden, I will try to atone for the harm I have done."



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"Shall I not see you again, Jacques?"

"Yes, once more, when you hand me your confession; then I will bid you adieu forever."

"To-night, if I am still alive," said Léa with a ghastly smile, "I will sing in 'Romeo and Juliet.' It will be my last triumph. If you are disengaged, Jacques, come to see me. The floral tributes they will give me shall be my funeral wreaths. Never again shall my voice be heard on that fine stage, where only yesterday I forgot my infamy amid the praises and acclamations showered upon me. I must leave all this art which has given me another personality, and sustained me in my hardest trials; the intoxication of success, which for an hour cast a kind of torpor over my sufferings; the idolatry of the populace, which permitted me to deceive myself as to my real degradation. I shall retire into obscurity . . . maybe into eternal oblivion! But that will be only just and right."

She gave a gesture of haughty scorn.

"I am mad! All this tinsel is not worth a single regret!"

She pointed to the window, where the dawn was beginning to lighten; then with a smile in which all her former grace reappeared, she said:

"You will pardon me, Jacques, will you not?"

He wished to reply. But she imposed silence on him, and continued:

"No; say nothing. Wait till to-night. . . . Adieu!"

She accompanied him to the door. In the dark vestibule Jacques felt Léa's arm gently caressing

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him, then her breast palpitating against his own; and, without his being able to prevent it, a pair of burning lips applied to his. He shuddered, and thrust aside this phantom of a love which had gone forever. A doleful sigh escaped her lips. The door opened and closed again. He was alone, with the staircase before him, and a broken heart in the room he had just left.

## Chapter VI

### THE DAY OF RECKONING

SORÈGE, on returning to his hotel, after that terrible evening on which Jacques had, as it were, risen from the grave to ruin him, sat plunged in profound meditation. He was not a man to be troubled by a matter of sentiment, but went straight to the end in a practical manner. The whole question, for him, lay in finding out what he had to fear or hope from Léa, and in what measure she would arm Jacques against him. That she hated him he had no doubt whatever; she had said so and repeated it a hundred times. The very previous night her rage against him had burst forth in violence and insults, which made her more desirable than ever in his eyes. He was one of those monsters who like to hear the cries of their victims and take delight in their tears.

That this woman whom he had treated as a slave should take a terrible revenge on him, should the opportunity ever offer itself, was a matter of course. He would have done it, therefore he had no doubt whatever that Léa would not hesitate to do it too.

As soon as Jacques and she have confessed to one another their respective wrongs, he thought, their alliance against me will be an accomplished fact. But what can Léa do? Her field of action is limited

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by the precautions she will take not to compromise herself. Ruin me—good; it will be a temptation for her, but she must know that such a course would bring ruin to herself also. And what comparison can be made between the harm she causes me and that she inflicts on herself? None whatever. She may accuse me of duplicity and lying, but at the same time she will be obliged to confess that she has committed a murder. And even if she accuses, who has the means of convicting me? No witness. Her testimony alone. That has a certain value to Jacques and a few friends, but to a judge it would have none whatever. Therefore the material result is nil. The moral harm this wretched woman might work me would suffice for her vengeance. She would disqualify me, compromise me without mercy, and that I would not endure, no matter what the cost. How can I avoid this?

He reflected long, lit a cigar, and began to smoke. In the curling fumes of blue smoke which slowly escaped his lips and ascended to the roof, he saw the images of Léa and Jacques flit past, sometimes dull and gloomy, then again active and triumphant. They were always together, however, united with the same intent, bound together by the same interests. Suddenly he arose, and with a gesture effaced this vision and began to walk to and fro the room. A few brief expressions escaped his lips, giving vent to his crowding thoughts, like a rush of steam from a boiler.

“What do I risk? A duel with Jacques or Tragomer? I am afraid of neither one nor the other. . . .

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A prosecution for false witness before the Assize Court? . . . Nonsense. . . . How would that benefit them? They can do nothing against me. . . . I can still do a great deal. I must see this stupid Léa, and find out how much she has confessed to Jacques. . . . Above all, I must make certain that she writes nothing. Finally, it is absolutely necessary that she disappear. . . . If need be . . . I will frighten her into this course; . . . she is afraid of me, and will obey me. . . . Once Léa is out of the way, I will play my game boldly. . . . Self-confidence and audacity alone will clear me. . . . But above all, I must lay in a reserve of strength. . . ."

He went to bed and slept till daybreak.

At the very hour Sorège opened his eyes, after a calm, tranquil sleep, as tho his conscience were free from stain, Jacques, after returning to the yacht, shut himself in the cabin, along with Marenval and Tragomer. The gray, smoky light which heralds the morn in the English capital appeared, while the boats were beginning to move about the river, and the dock-laborers to make their way along the quays. But the attention of the three men was not drawn by the spectacle of this incessant methodical activity, which is the characteristic of English work. Nothing that was taking place around was of any interest to them. Their attention was fascinated by the account Jacques was giving them of his interview with Jenny Hawkins.

"Then all we have imagined and guessed," said Tragomer, "is correct? And we shall have irrefutable proof of it?"

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"She is to hand it to me this evening."

"We are attaining our end," said Marenval enthusiastically.

"We have the monster at the death," resumed Tragomer, "but rest assured he will make a fine defense. You saw from his audacity last night, when his villainy was only partially exposed, what we may expect of him now that the whole truth is known. We must attack him with the utmost vigor. If we do not break him at a single blow, he will recoil, and we shall be compelled to submit to a violent shock. Before everything else, as it is a question of honor, we must warn Harvey of the state of things. If we leave him in ignorance as to the character of the man he has received as his future son-in-law, he would have the right to reproach us for our silence. Besides, I have promised to tell his daughter everything."

"This will be a blow to aristocratic infatuation in America," said M. Marenval. "In spite of one's money, one can not have husbands free from reproach. Better remain unmarried!"

"We must also inform Vesin; he has been a powerful help to us, and it is only right that he should be one of the first to hear of the success of our efforts."

"And now," said Jacques, "we must tell my mother that everything is going well. . . ."

"If you like, I will go this very morning to see Madame de Fréneuse," said Tragomer.

"Yes, Christian," said Jacques, with a smile. "That is your due; for you were the initiator, the first to see through this black crime, and to point out

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to Marenval the feeble light in the distance which guided you."

"When I think of what has taken place in the last six months," declared Cyprien, with simple frankness, "I seem to have been in a dream. I can see myself again in the club dining-room, after Maugiron and the rest had gone, where Tragomer commenced his recital of what he had seen at San Francisco. What he told me at first seemed impossible, then I was greatly impressed by the glimpse of the truth I had seen; and finally, I went almost mad over it. An incredible impulse came over me to go into the matter, tho at the same time I was terribly afraid of the complications I was likely to be involved in. Ah! I must confess that but for the influence Tragomer obtained over me, from that evening, I should have given up the struggle. But he inspired me with his own enthusiasm, there is no denying it. And once the little finger caught in that gearing, it was all over. The whole body had to follow. The visit to Madame de Fréneuse, old Giraud's confidential talk, and the interview with Campistron. . . . Ah! my dear Jacques, it was indeed extraordinary. Every step we took along the path on which we had entered, we saw our way a little more clearly. Never has a more interesting adventure been undertaken by two men. To set out in search of a Nansen or an Andrée was nothing in comparison with the fascination of our expedition. For we were not only going to the rescue of a man, we were also marching on to discover the truth. Vesin had perceived this when he said to us

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skeptically: 'You will not succeed, but I envy you making the attempt, and but for the fact that I hold an official position, I would set off with you!' Well! We have yielded to no obstacle, we have made headway against wind and tide, and now we have reached the harbor, with Jacques before us and the truth in our pockets. It is a great success, and will create considerable stir, no doubt!"

"The truth," said Jacques, "is not yet in our pockets, but it will be this evening."

Tragomer shook his head anxiously.

"Until these material proofs are safe in my hands, and we have the culprit's confession confirmed, I shall not be quite free from apprehension."

"What can you be afraid of, my dear friend?" asked Marenval impatiently.

"I am afraid that Sorège will bring about the disappearance of Jenny Hawkins before she has fulfilled her promise to Jacques. I know the despotic authority this villain exercises over the unhappy girl. He fascinates her; fills her with horror and fear. He juggled her away most skilfully under my very eyes at San Francisco. He will find some means of effecting her disappearance. In that case we may look for her in vain!"

"Then we must inform the English police," exclaimed Marenval, with the fury of a man who is told that the victory is not his when he already considered it as won. "We must not allow ourselves to be beaten at the last moment by this rascal. We should, indeed, be laughing-stocks in that case."

"Do not be uneasy," said Jacques, "I have taken



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my precautions. Léa has promised that she will remain in her room, and receive no one till this evening. To-morrow, she will have left London. And Sorège will have us alone to deal with. Therefore we will act as has been agreed upon. You, Christian, take the good news to my mother, and you, Marenval, go and see Vesin. I will call on Miss Harvey at her home, and there we will all meet."

When he awoke, his mind perfectly clear and determined, Sorège breakfasted and took a cab for Tavistock Street. He never did things by halves. After sleeping and eating well, he felt sure of himself. The important point was to speak to Jenny. If he could reach her, he did not despair of rallying her over to his side. Above all, he must know what arrangements had been come to between herself and Jacques. The carriage came to a sudden halt in front of the house, scattering all his combinations. Leaping on to the pavement, he ascended the staircase.

An old man wearing a threadbare pair of trousers and a frock-coat embellished with numberless stains, with a silk hat on his head, was engaged in washing the vestibule floor, in very conscientious fashion. Sorège glanced at him and passed by. But by the attitude and face of the man, as well as by his exaggeratedly wretched costume, his suspicions were aroused. He looked downward from over the rail as he proceeded. The man had stopped washing, and with upraised head was watching him. On reaching the second floor, Sorège rang the bell. No sound

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could be heard inside, not even the slightest step. It was the silence of an empty apartment. He rang a second time, and waited, his heart beating anxiously. Not a sound. Sorège felt certain that Jenny was at home and would not open the door to him. He also felt sure that she had entered the struggle against him and had been won over by his opponents. He turned pale with anger, but resisted the inclination that came over him to fling himself against the door and forcibly enter the room. The man in rags and tall hat downstairs caused him to reflect: If I make a noise and this idiot of a woman cries out, I may be carried off to the police-station. I must not run the risk of being forced to explain. He stood there for another moment, motionless, by the door, listening; and he imagined he heard a vague kind of sigh on the other side. The thought came to him that Jenny too was listening, and anxiously waiting for him to leave. Speaking as tho to a shadow, he whispered:

"Jenny, you are there, I know. You are mad! Open the door. You are in danger. . . . I have come for your own good. . . . Time is precious; you have been deceived. . . . Listen to me . . . ."

The shadow made no reply, and Sorège, his heart beating with rage, made a threatening gesture, and slowly descended the staircase. The dirty-looking man had resumed his occupation with the wash-rag, and seemed actually to be intensifying the filthy condition of the flagstones. As Sorège passed him, he raised his head, and touching his hat with his dirty hand, said in hoarse tones:

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"Is it the young lady in the furnished apartments you want, sir? . . . She has gone out for the day. . . ."

Sorège deigned no reply. He measured him with a glance and left the house. His hansom was waiting, and he rode away toward Hyde Park. It was ten o'clock. He alighted at the corner of Piccadilly, and proceeded toward the park on foot. He walked along the Serpentine, disheartened by the consciousness of his first rebuff. Evidently Jenny was betraying him, but what could she have said? Women are so clever in presenting things under the aspect most favorable to themselves. Without acknowledging the whole truth, might she not have thrown the whole responsibility on him? At this thought his features contracted, and he clenched his hands together. As he acknowledged, the previous night, when preparing his plan of defense, there was no witness. Even if he denied all participation in the crime, Jenny, on her side, might affirm that it was he who had abetted if not actually committed the crime. The safety of both had always depended on their union. United they might offer a defense, but divided they were undone.

He was sure the division had taken place as he walked there by the banks of the pretty, artificial river, surrounded with lawns and overhung with trees just springing into foliage. He shuddered with fear and anger at the same time, but he could not think of yielding. On the contrary, he strengthened himself in his determination to struggle to the very end, even tho he were to perish. A

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faint smile appeared on his lips. Perish, be it so, but not alone! Suffer defeat, but not without being avenged!

Along the lanes and bridle-paths riders began to appear, and carriages with their fine teams of horses—the finest in the world—rolled by. The world of fashion in its daily and monotonous splendor came into view. Sorège could not bear the idea of joining the throng. Plunging into Kensington Gardens, he walked to and fro, to while away a few of the hours which intervened until the time when he was expected at Julius Harvey's. When, later on, he entered a restaurant in Regent Street, he ate neither more nor less than usual, and on the stroke of two reached the Harvey mansion in Grosvenor Square.

Ascending the large staircase to the first floor, he found the steward, who awaited him with his usual respectful deference, and introduced him, as was his wont, into the small salon where Miss Harvey was accustomed to be at that time. She was sitting by the fireside, in which a bright log-fire was burning. The window opposite was open, to let the sunlight into the room. On seeing her fiancé enter, she arose to meet him without anything in her attitude to indicate a change of feeling toward him. Her countenance was calm, her look serene; but, doubtless, as chance would have it, she held between her fingers a rather voluminous book, on which she was engaged, so that she did not hold out her hand. Pointing to a chair in front of her, she placed the book on the table, and closed the window.

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"It is rather cold this morning," she said. . .  
"English springs are certainly rather frosty. . . ."

With an attempt at a jest, he said:

"Is it any better in America?"

"Oh! In America everything is better!" she said.  
"The seasons do not deceive us nor do the men."

He raised his head. The allusion was a direct one.  
An attack was beginning, and he replied at once:

"Nor the women either, doubtless?"

A blush passed over Miss Maud's brow.

"The women, above all!" she said proudly.

He watched her through his half-closed eyelids, which veiled his thoughts, but followed so well what was passing in the minds of others, and in firm tones said:

"Well, Miss Maud, I must have the proof. What is the meaning of such a reception?"

She rose slightly in her armchair, and replied:

"Monsieur le Comte, I will tell you that when you have explained to me why you allowed your friend Jacques de Fréneuse to be condemned without defending him."

He smiled in disdain.

"Ah, that is what is the matter, is it? Ask the man himself. Last night he was here under the name of Herbert Carlton. I suppose he will be able to explain to you better than he did to the judges the compromising position in which he was placed. A condemnation, in reference to good society, is always a bad sign. . . . People are not condemned so easily. And if America is the country of sincerity, France is the country of justice."

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"Fine phrase! Very fine sentiment! But I know that you are very eloquent, and so mere words will not satisfy me."

"Have we reached such a stage that I must exculpate myself before you?"

"We have reached a point at which each of us must know how matters stand. Just now we were enumerating the qualities of our respective countries. Among others, America possesses a predominating quality: common sense. I am a thorough American in this respect; and if I marry you, M. de Sorège, I do not want to have occasion to repent bearing your name."

"Miss Maud, you are quite right; for it is the only thing I bring you, or nearly so. But have you any reason to suspect that my name is compromised?"

"Monsieur le Comte, there are several ways of being compromised. One may be so in a material sense, as, for instance, by bad business bringing about bankruptcy. That is of no importance for us Americans. You fall and rise again; that is the see-saw of commerce and industry. The main thing is to end at the top. But a quality to which we attach enormous importance is moral integrity. A man who has committed a dishonorable action is one whom no self-respecting girl would marry, any more than she would a negro servant or a Chinese coolie."

Sorège smiled. Half-opening his eyelids, he asked tranquilly:

"What am I accused of? For that I am accused there can be no doubt whatever, and to justify my-

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self, I must know the nature of the calumnies spread concerning me. . . ."

"I wish with all my soul they may be nothing more than calumnies, for I should be too ashamed of having placed my hand in yours if you have really done what you are charged with."

"In the first place, give me the names of the persons who have brought charges against me."

"Monsieur de Tragomer, Monsieur Marenval, and finally Monsieur de Fréneuse himself. . . ."

"Fréneuse! That goes without saying. He must bring a charge against some one. . . . Tragomer and Marenval; an explanation is easy; the one is his friend, the other his relative . . . ."

"But you too were his friend! And it is that which renders your conduct incomprehensible. Why are you not so absolutely devoted to M. de Fréneuse as M. de Tragomer is? When I used to speak to you of him, why were all your replies ambiguous? Why are you now hostile to him? There is a secret between him and you; be frank, tell me what has separated you, and what makes you still enemies to one another?"

"There is his crime," said Sorège coldly. "There is his condemnation. And indeed that is quite enough. Do you think it possible for me to forget? If my memory failed me to such an extent, would not the world have reminded me of the fact that Jacques de Fréneuse passed through the Assize Court, sat in the prisoner's pen, and was carried away to prison handcuffed, and finally to the bagnio? You reproach me for forsaking him; was it not the same with all

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about him? A wretch who has fallen so low is a pest from whom every one flees in horror. This is not perhaps a sublime thing to do, but it is very human. One can not turn a convict into one's boon companion. When society, by a severe condemnation, has cast off a worthless fellow from its ranks, one can not go and take him in one's arms and laud and glorify him. I am only a man, not an angel. Saint Vincent de Paul or the Man with the Blue Mantle would doubtless have acted in a more Christian spirit. Besides, have Tragomer and Marenval acted any better? The unfortunate Jacques has been a pariah to them as well as to all who knew him. He was abandoned and given up by everybody. Why should it be imputed to me as a crime that I did the same? It has taken Tragomer two years to come round. And then, do you know why? Because he was in love with Mademoiselle de Fréneuse, and could not succeed in forgetting her, altho he made the attempt by taking a trip round the world. As for Marenval, he is a snob who can be made to do anything one likes by a mere promise that his name shall appear in the papers. These gentlemen conceived the plan of carrying off Fréneuse from the bagnio, secretly, and of bringing him to Europe. By exceptional luck, they have accomplished their object, and the condemned man is now at liberty. But he is as far from establishing his innocence as New Caledonia is far from England. And it is not by accusing at random one whose conscience does not accuse him that he will succeed in proving that an examining judge, twelve jurymen,



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three counselors, and the highest court of appeal in France have made so gross an error as to send an innocent man to the bagnio."

"Unless it were proved," said Miss Harvey, "that appearances had been so skilfully arranged as to render it impossible not to believe in the wretched man's guilt!"

"Ah! That is what they all say when they are condemned. It is easy enough to do so, but when proof must be produced. . . ."

The young girl interrupted him, and looking full into his face, said:

"Suppose the proof existed?"

Sorège turned pale; a flash of anger shot from his eyes as he exclaimed:

"What proof?"

"The confession of the crime by the author herself."

"And who committed it?"

"A woman. Must I mention her name? You may take your choice, for she is known by three names—the one by which you introduced her here, the Covent Garden prima donna; Jeanne Baud, whom you sent two years ago to England; and Léa Pérelli, the wretch by whose aid you worked out the plot of which Jacques de Fréneuse has been the victim. This is clear enough, M. de Sorège; now I want a reply and one free from all ambiguity."

"And has Jenny Hawkins brought such charges against me?"

"She will renew them in writing, for she has promised to do so."

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Of all that had been said, Sorège's awakened intelligence seized hold of this future tense; she *will* renew them. Accordingly, Jenny had not yet written or signed anything. He saw a loophole of escape, and bursting into a hilarious laugh which sounded strangely in the silence of the room, he said:

"Ah! She will write! Indeed! I have no doubt she will. For money you could obtain from that woman anything you like. What will that cost her? She will leave England with a well-filled purse, and will appear in some other country singing under a fourth name. The world is large; Italy and Spain are open to her; . . . women accustomed to the stage know how to disguise themselves. It is not difficult to deceive people. Besides, what is a written statement made to satisfy people's vengeance or interests? This very evening, Miss Maud, I will bring you, if you wish, the formal denial of all that has been written against me and signed by that girl. On the other hand, I shall demand to have the paper in which I am accused shown to me."

Miss Harvey turned toward Sorège, overcome by an emotion she could no longer conceal.

"Listen! I will not forget that I have had a feeling of friendship for you. It would be better if you would frankly confess what you have to reproach yourself with, rather than persist in your denial, contrary to all evidence. You are ruining yourself, . . . this girl is not lying when she says all this in self-accusation. . . .M. de Tragomer is not lying; Monsieur Marenval and Jacques de Fréneuse do not lie. . . ."

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Sorège suddenly sprang from his seat, and said savagely:

"If they do not, then I do, I suppose?"

At that moment the door opened, and Julius Harvey, his face burning with indignation, entered the room.

"Yes, indeed, you do!" he said, "if you must be told in plain language. By Jove! Has any one ever seen such obstinacy? My daughter has had too much patience. I would not have been so indulgent with you!"

Sorège replied in scornful tones.

"How do you call the manner in which you are now acting toward me?" he said. "In every country in the world it is called spying! So you were waiting there concealed, listening, with the intention of surprising me. Come! Summon your acolytes; it is time to look one another face to face!"

There was now nothing circumspect or wary, as was his wont, about Sorège's conduct. His features, suddenly assuming a hard expression, gave evidence of indomitable energy; his eyes, wide open, shot forth flashes of hatred and defiance, and he stood there, formidable to look at, and quite as ready to attack as to defend himself. Behind Julius Harvey, Tragomer, Marenval, and Jacques had made their appearance. With a wave of his hand, Sorège united them all in the insult he now hurled forth:

"You were listening at the doors! Come nearer, gentlemen, it will be easier for you to hear me. I give a formal denial to the accusations brought

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against me. The only knowledge I have had I disclosed last night to M. de Fréneuse himself, and too late to give him an opportunity of profiting by it. As for his personal conduct, with regard to his former friends, better not mention it; and if he has no recollection of the services Léa Pérelli rendered him, he is a villain!"

Tragomer made a movement so violent in the direction of Sorège that Jacques laid his hand on the other's arm to check him.

"The dealings I may have had with Léa Pérelli shall be settled between herself and me," he said. "As for those I have with M. de Sorège, they are of such a nature that in his own interest I advise him not to insist."

"What should I have to fear?" asked the Count recklessly.

"You? Nothing! Any other man, dishonor!" said Jacques.

"Are you insulting me?" asked Sorège, mad with passion.

"I told you not to insist," resumed Jacques calmly. "You have nothing to gain by doing so. I am astonished at your obstinacy, for you used to be far more clear-sighted. But as you will have the decisive words used, you shall be satisfied. When a man has acted toward a friend (who received him with open arms, and unfolded to him all his aspirations and plans, in full confidence and trust) in the manner you have acted toward me, that man is the most infamous scoundrel imaginable, Monsieur de Sorège. I have met at the bagnio, from which I have just

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returned, a great number of villainous characters, but I have never come across one so base as you!"

"Then this is what you want, is it? A duel, which if successful, would restore you to your former position in society?"

"Do not deceive yourself, sir, I do not seek an encounter with you. Altho I judge you, I disdain to punish you."

"Have you turned coward?" sneered Sorège.  
"Just the thing to complete the change in you."

"I have become patient," said Jacques quietly, "as I am now proving."

"Very well! Let us see if you are the most patient man living!"

He advanced three paces, and raising his arm, attempted to strike his former friend in the face. In a moment Jacques's countenance changed and assumed a terrible expression. Seizing Sorège's wrist, he flung him forcibly back, and with a cry of fury exclaimed:

"Do you want me to kill you?"

Suddenly he became calm, released the count, and addressing Miss Harvey said:

"Pardon me, I had no intention of having you witness a scene of violence, but my hand has been forced."

Sorège turned toward Maud, and with unflinching audacity said:

"I have promised you proofs, Miss Harvey; whatever happens, I will give them to you."

He gave a slight nod to Julius, and with a look of hatred at Tragomer, Marenval, and Jacques, said:

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"We shall meet again, gentlemen."

"I hope not, for your own sake," said Marenval, in disdain.

Sorège made no reply, but walked to the door and left the room. This was a relief to all present. Miss Harvey drew near her father, and with a forced smile said:

"You will, I think, pardon me for not following your advice, and for wishing to marry this man? Your first impression had not deceived you; you judged aright."

"My dear girl, a man who cared for neither dogs, horses, nor sailing; who despised business, and never looked one in the face, could not by any means be an honest man. You were free; I left you to yourself. But you will give your brothers great pleasure, I imagine, if you let them know that you have rejected this suitor."

"A snob!" murmured Marenval. "He called me a snob! Well! Tragomer, I promise you he shall pay dearly for the insult."

"Hush," said Christian in a low voice; "it is the time for action, not for recrimination. Everything is to be dreaded from such a man as Sorège so long as you have not thoroughly crushed him. You saw with what energy he defended himself. Let us leave Jacques here and call on Vesin."

The cowboys had just entered the room, and almost threw the shoulders of their father's guests out of joint by their vigorous handshakes. Tragomer and Marenval slipped away during this diversion. On the way out, they heard Miss Maud

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say to Jacques de Fréneuse, who was seated by her side:

"Your mother and sister will be very anxious to learn the result of this enterprise. I should like to make their acquaintance. Won't you take me to see them?"

Jacques replied:

"Yes."

Descending the staircase, Marenval halted, and said slyly to his companion:

"Do you know what I think, Christian? Miss Maud is in danger of falling in love with our friend. She is as romantie as a German girl."

"And she would not object to become a French-woman."

. . . . .

On leaving the house, Sorège trembled with fury. Out on the pavement, in the open air, he relieved his feelings by swearing in such a way as to scandalize a policeman on his beat. At first he walked straight ahead, without knowing where he was going. His blood was boiling and his head seemed ready to burst. The cold, calculating man had lost all his sang-froid. He was passing through one of those moments when one counts as nothing another's life, or even his own. If with a single word he could have annihilated the Harvey home, with all it contained, the insult he had just swallowed would have been adequately avenged. He went along rapidly for several minutes, then stopped suddenly. He had reached Whitehall. Plunged in profound

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reflection, he walked up and down in front of the palace.

Notwithstanding his precautions and stratagem, everything was coming to naught, all through that wretched Fréneuse. All the lies and treachery he had massed to ruin him had been without avail. Flung into an abyss so deep that it seemed impossible he should ever escape, Jacques had returned to light, liberty, and happiness. And he, Sorège, was now powerless to prevent this change of fortune! A distinct plan of vengeance came to his mind; he would strike his enemy, even tho he fell at the same time. In his present condition it was double or quits. Gambler as he was, he did not hesitate, and was willing to risk the sacrifice of his life if only he could crush Jacques.

He determined to call once more on Jenny Hawkins. She alone was to assure his triumph or his fall. She alone was capable of furnishing him with the means of defending himself. If only she were willing, if he could once more succeed in mastering her, either by persuasion or violence, things might not yet be altogether beyond hope. Turning in the direction of the Strand, he made his way toward Tavistock Street. It was four o'clock when he passed in front of Charing Cross.

Walking along, he mused: Before leaving for the theater, Jenny will dine at home as usual. If she was out when I called this morning, she will certainly be back at this hour. At whatever cost, by some means or other, I must have an interview with her, if only for a quarter of an hour. Let me sim-



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ply see her, let my eyes fasten on hers, and I will force her to obey me. Her will shall be paralyzed by mine.

On reaching the house, he noticed with evident satisfaction that the man in rags was no longer in the vestibule. On ascending the stairs he rang the bell. No reply. The same silence suggested complete abandonment. He paused on the landing. No manifestation of life in the room. Sorège trembled at the idea that Jenny had perhaps already left the house so as not to run the risk of meeting him. If Jacques had obtained her promise to remove, how could he find her in that mighty city? Time was flying and danger increasing. At whatever cost, he must prevent the betrayal becoming complete. If Jenny had spoken, it was of vital importance to prevent her writing. To do this he must see her. The door remained closed, and the apartment seemed to be unoccupied. He said to himself:

"Tho I wait here till night I will see her."

He sat down on one of the stairs in darkness and solitude, in ambush, like a hunter on the watch.

After a moment's pause he said aloud:

"Fool that she is to be afraid of me, when I come to save her, while the others are deceiving and ruining her."

Not a breath, not a footfall revealed the presence of a living being in the apartment. Sorège grew terribly uneasy. Quivering with impatience, he said:

"Even if I have to break in the door, I will find out if she is hiding from me."

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He sprang up, and gave the wooden panel such a blow that it split from top to bottom. At that instant the door opened, and Jenny, exceedingly pale and anxious, appeared on the threshold. With a sigh, she pointed to the apartment, and said in tired tones:

"Since I can not escape your persecution, enter."

Without a word he glided into the room, pleased at his success over her resistance, which he felt augured well from this first advantage. He took a seat in the small salon without waiting to be asked, and as she stood there with arms folded, looking anxiously at him, he said in sarcastic tones:

"So you have gone over to the enemy, have you? What have they promised you to make you turn against me?"

She made no reply, and he continued:

"Doubtless, they have assured you immunity? But how will that be possible? With Léa Pérelli alive, Jeanne Baud is under ground. And if it is Léa who has placed her there, it is no longer Jacques de Fréneuse. In what way, by what intrigue, can the one be innocent and the other spared?"

In plaintive tones she asked:

"What makes you imagine I want to be spared?"

"Then you wish, of your own accord, to atone for your crime?"

Proudly raising her head, and looking at him with flashing eyes, she said:

"Why not?"

"Have you become so low-spirited that you no longer care to defend yourself?"

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"I have had enough of deception, of flight, and mystery. Anything rather than recommence the life I have been spending the last two years."

"Ah! Why should you complain? Fortune has never favored you so lavishly. You have become both famous and rich. One might almost imagine that the shedding of blood is necessary to happiness! And you attach no importance to all these lucky chances. Come now, reflect a little; it is well worth while."

"I am tired of being a living lie!"

"Would it be any better if you were a dead sincerity. You are wandering, my dear. Do you know what will happen to you if you play the game Fréneuse's clique have advised you to play? At the very least, several years' imprisonment, perhaps the scaffold!"

"Very well!"

"Come, Jenny, we are not playing the fourth act of 'La Juive.' There is no necessity to go in for such musical graces in some great song. Matters are real and serious. Such a thing has happened, and may very well happen again. Do not sport with justice. For there is no mercy to be found there, and artistic laurels are of no value. These judges with their mantles of ermine will condemn you without pity if you allow yourself to be caught. Just listen to me reasonably for a quarter of an hour only, then I will leave you free to act as you wish. Is that understood? In the first place, what did Jacques say to you? What have you promised him? You met last night, I suppose, after that cursed soirée?

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You had not met for some time previously, and the utmost cordiality was doubtless manifested on both sides! He must be terribly angry with you. And he will feel no more tenderly toward me! Understand one thing, my dear, our fates are closely allied to one another, and if our enemies strike me, they strike you with the same blow."

He had continued to speak at leisure; not once had she tried to stop him. Leaning against the mantelpiece, her right elbow resting on the marble slab, she was playing mechanically with a long steel hat-pin, with a gold head, inlaid with sapphires. She was engaged in repeatedly thrusting the sharp point of the pin into the plush cover before her, and seemed to be paying no attention whatever to Sorège. He did not lose patience, for he knew that with that violent and inconsiderate nature he could only gain his end by artifice and deceit. Without being discouraged he continued:

"Evidently Jacques's object was to obtain a confession from you. If he suspected how matters had been worked in the rough, he wanted to find out the details of the plot, which would give full force to facts, and carry conviction to one's mind. Did he make you disclose anything? . . . What did you tell him? How did he succeed in convincing you? What part did he play? Perhaps he pretended to love you still?"

At this final insinuation, uttered in soft, mild tones, he saw a quiver come over her face. Understanding that he had hit the mark, he continued:

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"What do tender confessions of love cost him? He knows how credulous you are, and how often he has taken advantage of this feeling. A few caressing words, a promise to forget, hope of reconciliation, perhaps. You would start off far away, forget the past two years, and remember nothing but the old love. Was it so?"

Léa's face became deadly pale. Her eyes looked darker than ever, and she panted for breath. She was suffering cruelly. Then, with a laugh ringing with vengeance, he continued:

"Yes, doubtless I am right. And you were caught in the snare! Come! It was quite time I saw you and brought you back to your senses!"

Raising her head, she said slowly:

"That is true, it was indeed time!"

"Ah! you see!" he exclaimed in triumph.

She looked at him in haughty disdain:

"You misunderstand me. The whole of this day which I have just spent locked in my room, reflecting on the past, has been a very disagreeable time for me. Danger makes one suspicious, and I know that I am in danger. The worry of protecting oneself makes one cowardly. In spite of the promises I had received, a feeling of anguish came over me, as I wondered if I were not the victim of some treachery or other. I was deliberating in my mind whether I should keep to the engagement I had made, or should make my escape. Up to the time of your arrival, I hesitated. Now my mind is made up."

"You will leave?"

"No, I shall stay."

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"You will ruin yourself if you do!"

"But I shall save an innocent man."

"You are mad!"

"You have already told me so, and at times I have almost believed it. But you have just restored to me respect for truth and justice. In these few minutes you have shown yourself so crafty and cowardly in character that I can no longer think of abandoning the man you pursue with such implacable hatred. Between Jacques's safety and my own, I am ashamed to say that I was wavering. You now give me your advice, and all doubt and irresolution have vanished. To give myself up once more to such a monster as you are would render my crime infinitely more heinous than it is."

He started at the insult, and, leaping to his feet, said:

"Is this the manner in which you repay me for the sacrifices I have rendered you? I have compromised myself for your sake, and now you give me up to my enemies!"

"I have been nothing but an instrument of hate in your skilful hands; I know it now. You were the one to plot out the crime I committed. You are more responsible for it than I am. You did not compromise yourself to save me, you ruined me for your own satisfaction. We were two at the game. In the end it is I who have been your dupe and victim, always in revolt, and now implacable!"

He said, in sneering accents:

"Nonsense! Let us get at the truth! What weapon will you give your hero against me?"

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"A written confession, signed by myself, testifying to his innocence and my guilt."

He took a step forward.

"Where is this paper?"

"What does that matter to you?"

"You will hand it over to me at once."

"Never!"

"Ah, you foolish creature, take care! You must know me well enough to be certain that I shall not hesitate to crush you, if necessary; for my own safety."

"You may look, you will find nothing."

"Have you already sent it?"

"Yes, this morning."

"You lie; you said you had wavered, hesitated, till I came!"

Seeing herself baffled, she gave a start, and instinctively turned her eyes toward a blotting-pad lying on a table near the window. With a bound he was across the room, and in spite of all her efforts to prevent him, holding her off with one hand and feeling with the other, he seized hold of a letter on which was written Jacques's name.

He stood there, somber and threatening, looked at Léa for several moments, and said:

"So this is it! I never thought you would have dared to denounce me."

"What is the use of taking it?" exclaimed the singer angrily. "If you destroy it, I can write another!"

"I will take precautions against such an event. Sit down at this table! . . ."

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He pointed to a table on which lay the crumpled blotting-pad. She made no reply. He approached her, seized her by the wrist, and thrusting her into the chair in front of the table, said:

"Now write."

"What shall I write?"

"Simply this: 'The pretended confession obtained by M. de Fréneuse was extorted from me under a threat of death. Free and mistress of myself, I make a complete retraction. I have never committed the crime of which he has compelled me to accuse myself.'"

She looked at him quietly, and then said:

"After?"

"That is all."

She stood upright. They were face to face, free from any further constraint, breathing hatred and violence.

"If you do not write it, you vile wretch, I will kill you!"

Seizing her hand, he pressed it with all his might. Léa turned livid with anger and pain combined; she struggled, but he held her as tho in a vise. She exclaimed:

"You are hurting me! Let me go! Release me!"

"Obey!"

"I will not!"

"Obey!"

She shrieked aloud, and twisted about; her eyes filled with tears.

"Have mercy! you are torturing me, you coward!"



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"Obey, you brute; I will break your arm if you do not obey me!"

He was terrible to behold in his fury, and a murderous look appeared in his eyes. In mad distraction, she fell on her knees. Close by, the long steel pin, with sapphire-mounted head, which had fallen to the ground during the struggle—a real stiletto—lay shining on the carpet. Stretching out her hand, she seized it, and stood upright again. With a blow he again thrust her toward the table.

"Come, make haste! I have no time for sport; your hand is not bruised or numbed so much that you can not write. . . . Write! . . . " As she still stood there, motionless and stupefied, he struck her a violent blow on the shoulder, and said:

"Are we to begin again? . . . By thunder! I will. . . ."

Not another word did he utter. With a cry of rage, Léa had turned round and struck him in the throat with the long needle. The blade disappeared beneath the collar; Sorège remained standing, with eyes fixed and mouth open, a stupid smile on his lips. He threw apart his arms, wildly beating the air. Then he tried to tear out the murderous weapon piercing him, tottered forward a few steps, then his knees gave way, and he fell with a horrible groan. His breast struck the carpet, and the shock drove the pin into the body right up to its sapphire head. A convulsive quiver ran through him, causing him to turn on his back, then all was quiet.

Bending over him with a feeling of horror, Léa

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saw a terrible grimace on the face of the corpse. Not a drop of blood had been shed. The pin had hermetically closed the wound, and the point had penetrated right to the heart. With furtive steps, as tho afraid of waking him from his frightful sleep, Léa threw a mantle over her shoulders, opened the door, and, fleeing from the man who, lying there in death, terrified her even more than in life, she escaped into the street. Unconsciously, she proceeded in the direction of her theater. It was six o'clock. As she passed before the doorkeeper the latter said:

"Ah, madam, you are ahead of time! Here is your key. The dresser has not yet come. Are you dining in your box?"

She made no reply, but ascended the stairs leading to the first floor. At the end of a long passage she opened a door, and entered the room which she made use of as a salon. There she sat in the darkness, with a feeling of dull despair, then burst into a torrent of tears.

That evening Miss Harvey reached the theater in good time, and appeared in her box as soon as the curtain had risen. Capulet was introducing his daughter to the lords and nobles assembled in the place. Juliet smiled, but the grace and beauty of her countenance was veiled by a look of sadness. She sang her valse with a feverish brilliancy; the meeting with Romeo won her a double round of ap-

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plause. She neither bowed her thanks nor appeared to notice this enthusiastic greeting.

In accents of profound sadness she uttered the line:

"The tomb shall be our bridal bed."

The curtain fell, and remained down in spite of the enthusiastic clapping and cheering from the pit. Never had Rovelli and Jenny Hawkins sung better; that was the unanimous sentiment of all present. The performance began in a way to warrant success. Julius and his two sons were in the box, in which also a place had been reserved for Marenval. Tragomer and Jacques had taken a corner box, so as to be out of sight. They had dined with Madame de Fréneuse, and had been so happy in that tender family intimacy that the hours had sped on, rapidly and unnoticed, and it was striking eleven when they entered the theater.

The fourth act was drawing to a close. Tragomer, at the fall of the curtain, went over to Harvey's box, while Jacques made for the greenroom. According to promise, he was to receive from Jenny Hawkins the written declaration, which was to be an invincible protection for him. Accompanied by an usher he reached the first floor, and through a hot and perfumed atmosphere proceeded along the passage and halted in front of a door, at which his conductor knocked. The dresser opened, and Jacques saw the singer stretched out on a sofa, surrounded with bouquets and baskets of flowers. Pale and motionless, in Juliet's nuptial robe, she resembled Capulet's daughter, sunk in a death-like

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sleep. She made not a movement as she saw Jacques enter. A sad smile played on her lips as she said gently:

"You are very late, *mon ami*. I have had a great success. Look at these flowers; I am an object of admiration and envy. . . . I am a beautiful idol, am I not? Who would not like to change places with me?"

The dresser left the room. Scarcely was the door closed, than Léa leaped to her feet, and a complete change came over her, as with contracted features and quivering voice she drew Jacques into the most remote corner of the room, and said:

"Look at me attentively. . . . Do you not see anything strange in my glance? Am I the same woman?"

"What is the matter with you?" asked Jacques, startled at her agitation. "What has happened?"

"What was fated should happen," she said with unsteady eyes. "Sorège came to see me. . . ."

"And you received him?"

"I was obliged to do so! He threatened to wait for me till I left the room. I could not escape him; one can not flee from the inevitable! I had told you so. . . . I knew it, my fate was marked out beforehand."

"What did he dare to do?" asked Jacques, beginning to feel uneasy.

"All he was capable of doing. . . ."

Pushing back her bracelets, she showed the marks of Sorège's fingers beneath the white of the powder.

"He almost broke my arms in trying to force me

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to disavow my declaration. . . . He would have killed me, I believe. . . ."

"And you obeyed him?"

She looked up into Jacques's eyes, and with a smile which brought back to his memory the tender, faithful Léa of bygone days, said:

"I did not obey him, Jacques, not because I cared for my own life, but for yours."

"Well?"

Lowering her voice, she said affrightedly:

"I had to choose between him and myself, Jacques. I did choose. He will never harm another in this world. The declaration I was to hand you this evening is in his pocket; there you will find it. I did not dare to take it. . . . He is lying there stretched out in the salon of my apartment in Tavistock Street; his eyes starting from their sockets, and a threatening expression still on his mouth. . . ."

"You have killed him?"

"Hush! It must not be known till to-morrow. I must be free until the end of the opera. I have not yet finished the task for which I am paid. I must sing; to-night the audience has gone wild over me, and rightly so."

An uncertain look came over her as she thus spoke. Jacques imagined that her brain, too severely taxed by all the trials she had undergone, had lost its balance, and that she was going mad. He thought of calling some one, as he did not believe what she was saying. But he saw in the poor woman's eyes a look of such frightful despair that he had a presentiment of impending misfortune.

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Along the passage, the call-boy's voice was heard shouting out:

"On the stage for the last act."

As he passed by the door he said:

"Miss Hawkins, may we commence?"

She replied quietly:

"I am coming."

Taking from one of the baskets of flowers a white orchid with red spots, she offered it to Jacques with the words:

"Keep it in memory of me. This flower is like my soul; stained with blood spots and yet pure. . . ."

"Léa," said Jacques terrified, "ask for a moment's respite. You are no longer mistress of yourself. . . ."

"No! I have never been more sure of myself. . . . This is the death act, Jacques; you will see how well I shall sing it. Go, hear me to the end! You must do as I say!"

He wished to calm her and hold her back.

"Léa!"

She looked at him for several seconds, smiled once more, then with a passionate gesture flung herself into his arms and said:

"Kiss me, do kiss me! This is the last time we shall ever see one another. Let me take away with me the memory of your lips on my brow."

He gently gave in to her caprice. Then, with extraordinary force, she pressed him to her heart and exclaimed:

"Oh, if you had always loved me! I would live on and be happy!"

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Waving her hand in despair, she added:

"Ah! it is too late now! Adieu!"

She flung him a final kiss, and ran out of the room. The sublime prelude of the death act was being played solemnly by the orchestra. Jacques, anxious and troubled, returned to his box and rejoined Tragomer. The act had begun, and Romeo was singing. Jacques leaned over to Christian and whispered to him:

"I do not know what is going to happen, but Léa has lost her reason. She has just told me that Sorège called this afternoon, and threatened and struck her, and that she had killed him."

"Good Heavens!" said Tragomer; "what then?"

"Look at her! . . . Is she not frightful to behold? . . ."

The pallor of death on her cheeks, Juliet was rising from her funeral couch, to fall into her lover's arms. In a tone of voice which sounded as tho muffled by the twilight of eternal night, she told her joy at waking again on his breast. Then the poison began to take effect, and Romeo began to faint and turn pale. She held him there forcibly, bending over him with an expression of poignant grief, as tho reproaching herself for this death he was dying for love of her. She tore from Romeo's girdle the dagger attached to it, and fixing thereon a glance of happy relief, she sang forth in a cry of deliverance, the line:

"Oh! happy blade! Thou art my sole resource!"

With firm, resolute arm she brought down the

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dagger on the very spot where Sorège had been struck. She still remained standing, but her voice died away on her lips. A streak of blood escaped from her throat on to the white robe. Then a mask of darkness came over her eyes. At that instant, Rovelli arose, and rushed to his companion, exclaiming:

"Help! She is wounded!"

Shrieks of horror arose from every part of the theater. The spectators stood upright and looked on terrified. The singer slowly waved her hand as tho to say that nothing could be done. A final smile played on her lips, her last thought being for Jacques. In that memorable moment her beauty shone forth with such brilliancy that a profound silence fell upon the two thousand spectators and the final sigh could be heard as it escaped her lips. She tottered like a broken flower, and on the very stage where she had triumphed in the glory of her art and the sublimity of her sacrifice she fell dead.

Inspector Melville, of Scotland Yard, summoned by telephone, had at once visited the singer's rooms in Tavistock Street. There, stretched on the carpet, in the salon, lay Sorège, a horrible grimace on his livid countenance. In the pocket of his frock-coat the declaration written by Jenny Hawkins testifying to Jacques's innocence had been found, and was handed over to the French Embassy by the London police. Vesin started back for Paris to hurry on the revision of the trial. The Harveys, on their yacht,



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Marenval, Tragomer, and Fréneuse's family on the *Magic*, set off together for Cowes.

In the intimacy of an active and free existence, sailing out in the open, or at anchor in the Solent Roads, the young people spent two delightful months. Mademoiselle de Fréneuse's beauty, revived by happiness and hope, shone forth with renewed radiance. She showed herself full of affection and love for Christian, as tho determined to make him forget her past severity.

Jacques, now quite gentle and looking rather grave, so different from his former self that it would have been impossible to recognize him as the same man, found great consolation and pleasure in conversing with Miss Harvey, who never tired of asking him to relate to her his past life and adventures. He acknowledged his faults and errors, and told the tale of his sufferings with a humility and emotion which went to the young girl's heart. Only by rowing and riding did he regain the vigor and ardor of his youth. Even then, he was only induced to take this exercise by the eager entreaties of his friends and his mother's prayers. Madam de Fréneuse, anxious over Jacques's religious inclinations and desiring to see him take renewed interest in natural life, encouraged her son's intimacy with Maud. But it was soon seen that even in this time of joy, none of the projects he had formed and ripened in the hours of his anguish could be changed.

The month of August was drawing to a close, and Julius Harvey announced his intention of reaching Portsmouth, for the purpose of obtaining a fresh

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supply of provisions and coal, before crossing to America. He had business to attend to in his own country, and the cowboys were obliged to return to the prairie to superintend the ranch. Miss Maud resigned herself to accompany her father; however, she would have liked Madame and Mademoiselle de Fréneuse and Jacques to accompany them.

"The trial which will prove your son's innocence will not take place for several months. What will you do in the mean time? If you return to France you will be obliged to live there in a very retired way, and M. de Fréneuse will in all probability be obliged to surrender to the authorities. Until a new verdict has been pronounced he will still be looked upon as guilty. Come with us then to New York. . . . We will let my father and my brothers go on to Dakota, while we settle down quietly at Newport. M. de Tragomer will accompany us; as for M. Marenval, I believe he is anxious to return to Paris."

"Come along, Tragomer," said the cowboys; "we will go shooting bisons on the uplands. There are still a few fine herds left, and we will camp in tents with the Cherokees. . . . You will see some of the finest horses in the world, capable of running twenty-four hours at a stretch. . . . We will go salmon-fishing in the creeks. . . . There are some fine spots in which monsters dating from the deluge may be taken! . . . Come along, Tragomer, come! Once Jacques touches American soil we will make a new man of him. . . . He is a fine sportsman; we must never let him turn vicar!"

The final attempt was made by Miss Maud herself.

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One evening, while walking about the deck of the *Magic*, in the Cowes Roads, with Jacques, she came to a sudden stop, and leaned her elbow on the gunwale of the yacht. A phosphorescent glow spread over the sea. On every hand, electric beams marked the positions of the vessels at anchor, while a light, warm wind could be heard whistling through the rigging. Innumerable stars covered the sky with their flashes of pale gold. It was a delightfully serene night. The young girl, nibbling at a rose, was leaning over the side of the vessel, looking at the sea, without uttering a word; Jacques, by her side, was absent-mindedly listening to music in the distance. Suddenly Miss Maud fastened a penetrating glance on Jacques's face, and said:

"Monsieur de Fréneuse, I must speak clearly to you this evening, so that later on I may not have any mental reservations or regrets. You have formed plans regarding yourself of a nature to afflict both your mother and your sister, without mentioning your friends, in whose number we may hold a place. The influence and authority over you to which the latter lay claim is very feeble compared to that of these two ladies who have bewailed your future so bitterly. Still, there is such an affection as might have a decisive influence over a man's life. The one who is the object of such a feeling ought to know it."

She paused, slightly troubled, both by the importance of the confidence she was about to impart and the difficulty of completing it. But she was bold and determined, and she continued fearlessly:

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"You have committed many mistakes, but your great sufferings have atoned for them all. You are, accordingly, free with regard to yourself. When you see the grief of your family at your wish to renounce the world, why do you persist in your resolution? You owe some compensation to those who have suffered for your sake. Finally, if a woman, moved by your misfortunes, and touched by your atonement, sincerely devoted to you, offered to soothe the secret wounds of your heart and heal them, and found her whole happiness in making you again the man you ought to have been, would you refuse her proffered love?"

Proudly raising her forehead, in an attitude of determined intelligence, she continued:

"I am that woman; I love you and offer you my hand. If you will give me yours in return, you will find in me a resolute and devoted companion for life. I will help you to accomplish the good it is your dream to render humanity, for the evil it has bestowed on you. All I ask you to do is to give me a frank reply, for I suffer from not knowing whether I am to be glad or resigned. Say Yes, and I will go with you to see my father, and I will kiss your mother with all my heart. Say No, and I will leave to-morrow, so that you may not be witness of my tears."

She held out her hand. In the clear moonlight he saw how pale she was, and that her eyes were full of tears. Bowing with respectful sorrow, he replied:

"Even tho my sincerity grieve you, Miss Maud, I

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will obey you and speak frankly. I am touched to the depths of my heart by your generous and charitable affection. You have been tempted, . . . which is only womanly, . . . by the work of love and pity to be accomplished with regard to an unhappy man like myself. But I judge myself more severely than you do. I know what depths of depravity still remain in this heart, which you believe to be now pure. I can better measure the depths of my fall, and I do not believe that even an angel, such as you are, can redeem me so easily. I do not feel myself to be worthy of you, Miss Harvey; with humility I confess it, tho I weep with gratitude at your goodness of heart."

He had taken her hand, which he raised, wet with tears, to his lips. He continued in trembling tones:

"Finally, I must tell you, as I have already told my other friends, I am no longer free to dispose of my life. I made a vow, at the gravest moment of my existence, when my salvation or destruction was being decided; I swore to devote myself to the service of God, if He would permit me again to see my family and my country, and to prove my innocence. He has heard my prayer. I no longer belong to myself: I belong to Him, who, after punishing me in His justice, has had sovereign pity on me. Pardon me, Miss Maud. If any woman on earth could accomplish the work you have dreamed of, that woman is indeed yourself. God alone has been preferred before you!"

She looked at him once more for the last time, understood that there was no hope, and, heaving a

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sigh, let fall into the sea the flower her lips were touching, while at the same time there faded away into an empty void the dreams of her imagination. Only one word did she utter:

“Adieu!”

And, gliding along the deck, like a shadow, she passed out of sight.

The following morning Julius Harvey's yacht weighed anchor and steamed away toward America.

THE END.

AUG 27 1920







